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BOOK PARADE

Howard Spring

BOOK PARADE



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BOOK PARADE

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Foreword

This is a collection of book reviews. The paper on Kitchener appeared in *The Manchester Guardian*. All the others appeared in *The Evening Standard*. I thank the editors of these newspapers for permission to reprint.

It was not my idea that these fugitive writings should come together within the covers of a book. It was suggested to me that it would be interesting to preserve them, and I consented for one reason only: that they illustrate the day-to-day work of a book-reviewer.

This work is different from that of a literary critic, and I wish we could get the thing straight in our minds and say critic when we mean critic and reviewer when we mean reviewer. Even more do I wish that we could find some other name—"play reporters" would do—for the men who have to compose a piece of writing about a play within an absurdly short time after the fall of the curtain.

The difference between a literary critic and a book-reviewer may be briefly stated. A critic is a man who requires three columns in which to write about a book which he fears no one has the slightest intention of reading. A reviewer is a man who is lucky to get a column in which to write about a book which he hopes and believes many people will want to read. The reviewer is the reporter of the crime. The critic is the ultimate judge who passes sentence and sends the criminal to dangle in the obscurity of immortality.

I prefer the reviewer's job : the incomparable thrill of seeing Sally coming down the street on a lovely Sunday morning with a fine new bonnet and all : a thrill so much more poignant than the critic will know a hundred years hence, when, in some museum, he turns over the clothes that Sally wore and talks learnedly of pleats and tucks and gussets.

Chesterton, in his *Autobiography*, speaks of the difficulty of conveying "how immensely important certain individuals appeared at certain epochs," and he uses the phrase "for those men are no longer topics, even when they are classics."

This is true. You have only to read in contemporary letters and memoirs of the extraordinary fuss that broke out when Fanny Burney's *Evelina* was published to see how true it is. The fuss was contemporary; Fanny was a topic. *Evelina* itself, read at this distance of time, leaves us cold, gives us no hint of the reason for the fuss. It has become tucks and pleats and gussets, and if there is so much as a ghost inhabiting them, it is perceptible only to the eye of an earnest critic.

A reviewer must have within him the potentialities of a sound critic. The better furnished the background of his mind is, the better reviewer he. But, when all is said and done, the job demands an alert intelligence rather than a profound erudition. A critic, quite rightly, would not deal with a book unless he knew its subject inside out. A reviewer may. A writer, on however specialised a subject, hopes in his heart for more than a specialised audience. A critic can tell him only whether he has made his case with fellow-pundits. A reviewer can tell him whether his book has anything to give to a wider public.

If I am dealing with a work on astronomy, I shall not be able to say, as a learned critic doubtless could,

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just where the author has slipped up on a matter of a billion light years; but I shall be able to say whether, as an average sort of reading person, the book is dead meat to me or living nourishment.

That, then, is the reviewer's job. He is a reporter on all sorts and conditions of books as they come from the press. The trouble with a selection of the sort which is here got together is that most of the books with which a reviewer deals are transient things—not with the lovely transience of beech-leaves in spring, but with the horrid transience of confetti trampled underfoot at a fair. As this must be—or try to be—a readable book as well as an illustration of the processes of reviewing, the difficulty has been got over by reprinting, for the most part, those reviews which deal with men and women of perennial interest. Therefore, be it understood that no claim of greatness is made for all the books reviewed. Some of them are magnificent; some are mediocre; but in nearly every case the subject is full of interest.

It will be seen, too, that a few of the reviews deal with books which I think are bad. I have put them in to illustrate a part of the reviewer's job which seems to me to be insufficiently exercised to-day: the duty of depreciation. Particularly when pretentiousness and silliness are accepted as excellent, it is a reviewer's business to say what he thinks about them. It is said that an unfavourable review may help as much as a favourable one to sell a book. This is not the reviewer's business. He is not concerned either with selling books or with preventing them from being sold. He is concerned with nothing but telling the truth about a book as he sees it.

Finally, may I say a word as to why I have chosen for inclusion here the reviews of a few novels out of the thousands which I have read.

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Catherine Brody's *Nobody Starves* is here because it is a representative book of our time. It has no claim at all as "literature," but it was among the first to represent the condition to which financial and political idiocy reduced the American people at the time of the great "slump."

I have included Carl Fallas's *The Wooden Pillow* because it is of a grace and delicacy rare in English fiction. It is episodic, a series of pictures rather than a growing, organic thing; but the pictures are incomparable within their class, which is the class of fine oriental brushwork, and I shall never tire of commending them for that.

Lewis Grassic Gibbon, who wrote *Grey Granite*, is dead; and there are, alas! few cases of a novelist, neglected during his life, being recognised after his death. Nevertheless, the trilogy of which *Grey Granite* forms a part is worth the whole output of many a novelist rolling at this moment in recognition and royalties.

James Hilton's *Good-bye, Mr. Chips* is here. I have been upbraided more than once for calling it a great book. Well, I include it because I think it is a great book.

Isak Dinesen's *Seven Gothic Tales* have the qualities of wonder and imagination to a degree that is rare to-day; and *Salavin*, by Georges Duhamel, has what is almost equally rare: the divine quality of pity.

The formidable reputation of Aldous Huxley could not persuade me to like *Eyeless in Gaza*, and perhaps the only reason why the review appears here is to damn my judgment in the eyes of posterity.

The notice of *Sparkenbroke* is given because Charles Morgan is Charles Morgan; and here you may see how one reviewer reacted to his painstaking surgery upon language and humanity.

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## *Kings, Queens and Emperors*



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## *Edward and Victoria*

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A lady-in-waiting once took a peep into the nursery of Marlborough House. The boy who was to be King George was playing with his elder brother. "No noise or fuss of directions about them," the lady-in-waiting recorded. "I congratulated their poor father. He said he thought it very happy not to have to be always at them. Then, he added, 'We were perhaps a little too much spoken to and at. At least, we thought we could never do anything right, anyhow.'"

The "poor father" was still Prince of Wales. He had to wait a long time for most things, including a crown. He had to wait a long time before it was acknowledged that he could do anything right.

How long and how tedious the waiting was is made clear in Mr. Hector Bolitho's new book, *Victoria the Widow and Her Son*. This, with his *Albert the Good* and *The Prince Consort and His Brother*, makes a valuable trilogy, a trefoil window through which we get an authentic and unsensational glimpse of the Victorian interior.

It is an astonishing spectacle that we see through the window, and nothing is more astonishing than the old Queen, a widow for goodness knows how many years, still surrounded, like Dickens's Miss Havisham, by all the mementoes and memoranda that kept the good ghost of Albert walking. On her wall was a picture of herself as a nun, standing with clasped hands before a vision of her husband; and



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so profound was the obsession that Beaconsfield, "prostrate though devoted," as he wrote to her from his death-bed, made a memorable reply when asked if he would like to see the Queen. "No," he said. "It is better not. She would only want me to take a message to Albert."

Always the ghost of Albert rattled the chilly chains of his inhibitions between the Queen and her warm-blooded son. Again and again they reached their hands towards one another, but they reached their hands across a grave which the Queen kept consciously open, and always at the moment when contact might have been established the tenuous wraith of the Coburg Prince floated between and iced the waters that were about to be troubled.

Perhaps those hands that stretched towards each other never came nearer to touching than when the Prince lay stricken with fever and all the nation held its breath. It was then that Alfred Austin wrote, so it is alleged :

*Flashed on the wire the fateful message came ;
He is no better, he is much the same.*

But the Prince could not always be ill and dependent. There could be always new reasons for misunderstanding.

There was, for example, the question of the title which the Prince of Wales should bear when he came to the throne. Albert Edward his names were, and the Queen's wish was that he should be called King Albert Edward, so that his father's name might be associated with the Crown. But the Prince didn't like a double-barrelled name for an English King. If not plain Edward, why not plain Albert? To which the Queen answered : "There can be but one Albert."

The English people called their King Edward when they did not, affectionately, call him Teddy.

Victoria, shut up with her dear ghost in Windsor, Osborne or Balmoral, taking his relics with her as she moved from shrine to shrine, was not in London save when forced to be, and that was rarely.

She was not the only Victorian widow to make a shrine of a mortuary. She was not the only Victorian parent to keep a heavy and oppressive hand upon the up-springing of young life. The central sanity of Mr. Bolitho's approach to her and her problem is that he sees her as typical, not remarkable. He looks upon Royalties not as "exalted people marred by human faults, but as ordinary mortals struggling with an extraordinary problem."

So he sees the problem of this exalted widow and her son as an ordinary problem in an extraordinary setting. "The early Victorian yoke was too much for the young of the day. It was not the Queen's yoke, but the yoke of all her generation."

That is true, but it is also true that the Queen's remarkable strength of will, reacting to a will which in her son was just as strong, though cloaked in buoyancy and grace, produced a very pretty test case of what Mr. Bolitho calls the effort to develop through frustration. The Queen headed off her son from all responsible tasks, yet expected to find in him a responsible mind. She was "asking plants to grow without roots."

The reason for her intensive concentration of all affairs in her own hands is excellently put by Mr. Bolitho in the phrase "the Divine Right of Kings was not wholly dead in the Queen's personal devotion to her position." Her sense of responsibility was terrific; she was "strong-willed and righteous"; and Mr. Bolitho persuades us to share his belief that

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though her acts were sometimes in error her motives never were.

She could be hard as flint. She could say when Gladstone died: "Why should I pretend to be sorry when I'm not?" But she could be as sentimental as a schoolgirl when Albert was in question.

Both the widow and her son come out of this book with far more humanity and with a more intense royalty than some recent examinations have accorded them. Mr. Bolitho has made a fascinating study of this woman who ruled an empire from a mausoleum, whose thoughts were all tinged with precedents and the past, and the man whose gay humanity was for ever reaching out to newer modes of cementing the concord of crowd and Crown.

The book is written with ease and grace. Not only the Queen and her son but the great statesmen and soldiers of the age move through its pages.

The author uses them all to illustrate brilliantly his story of the culmination of an age: an age that was in many ways unmatched in our history, but which was destined, for all its apparent solidity, to have its essential outlines modified more drastically than any Victorian would have thought possible.

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### *Prince Albert and His Brother*

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Albert, Prince Consort of Great Britain and Ireland, married at twenty, a grandfather at thirty-nine, dead at forty-two, laid it down that "man is a beast of burden, and he is only happy if he has to drag his burden, and if he has little free will. My experience teaches me every day to understand the truth of this more and more."

He was writing to his brother Ernst, his senior by a year or so, Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. Though Ernst was older than Albert, Albert always wrote to him like a Dutch uncle.

He was a queer card: humourless, earnest, hard-working, scrupulous, driven by a consuming sense of duty, the very essence and epitome of those virtues which the Victorians admired when they were persuasively presented in the works of Samuel Smiles.

Yet Albert did not get on with the Victorians. Coldness, suspicion, hostility were directed against the man who in many ways was the most characteristic Victorian of them all; and it has been left to our own so different day, with values which are not in most things the values of the Victorians, to appraise the man at his true worth and to recognise that in practising what other Victorians were contented too often only to preach he has shown us something of what that age might have been had it followed unswervingly its own best instincts.

Much of our juster understanding of Albert is due to Mr. Hector Bolitho, whose *Albert the Good*

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ensured to history a portrait where there had been danger of a caricature. Now Mr. Bolitho gives us *The Prince Consort and His Brother* a collection of two hundred letters written by Albert to Ernst between 1838 and 1862.

Had Ernst been like Albert this book would have lost most of its value. But Ernst was an easy-going scallawag, a thorn in Albert's side, a constant irritant in Albert's tender conscience, a heavy drinker and a hardened gallant; and thus he provides the perfect incentive for making these letters richly illustrative of Albert's character.

One of the constant preoccupations of the earlier letters is fear as to the effect Ernst's excesses will have upon his health; and it is an ironic comment on Albert's solicitude that, he being dead almost before middle age was reached, Ernst, who did all the wrong things, lived to reach nearly his eightieth year.

Albert loved his home, the beautiful castle of Rosenau and the rugged country about it. He loved the hunting, and the ring of skates on ice, and the plays and music in the great hall. He loved his brother for all his faults.

Whether he loved Victoria is an open question. The Duchess of Bedford said, "Not a bit," and she thought he gave the impression "of not being happy."

He was no more than a boy when he came to this country. He brought his dog Eos with him, and a bullfinch, and his servant, Cart; and on his first birthday in England he found the faces of Cart and Eos friendly.

But though, even twenty years later, the death of Cart was a terrible blow to him, and though the friendly face of Eos could long recall the crash of the chase through the glades of Coburg, there never was a man who more resolutely put youth behind him

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and took with ever more eager amplitude the burdens and responsibilities of manhood.

He is hardly settled in England when he is telling Ernst, "I make myself acquainted with politics, read telegrams, and study secret reports"; and he congratulates himself on his statesmanlike wariness, being "conscientious to the last degree with papers, documents, and in conversation."

Old Stockmar is standing off and on, that crafty old sheepdog who rounded so many German princelings into the right folds; and Albert does not omit to pass on to Ernst any gems that fall from Stockmar's lips: now a verse of Goethe, now a line from "The Coburg Hymnal."

Occasionally Ernst cuts up rough at the schoolmasterly tone of Albert's letters; and once is so resentful that Albert threatens, "I shall leave you to perish in immorality."

One's sympathy is with Albert. It is clear that he had a good deal to put up with from his Coburg relatives. To be married to the Queen of England seems never to have presented itself to him as other than a high responsibility; to them it seemed now and then an opportunity too good to be missed.

There has been a letter from Albert's father. "He said I should do all I could to get the £50,000, and that, now and then, not to forget my small country."

Till now the old man has been a "Highness." Now he is worrying Albert to be made a "Royal Highness"; and yet again "I return papa's letter to you. The principles he shows in it can really sting one to one's heart. Always money and always money."

With his own family growing up about him, there is always trouble with the family in Coburg. Now Ernst, who is in the hands of the Jews, has to be

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prevented from selling the family portraits; now, when he is at last married and has succeeded to the title, he has to be chided for his miserliness to his wife. "Give Alexandrine pin money."

And there is the trouble that Palmerston dislikes the Coburgs anyhow. "In the 'Coburg conspiracy,'" writes Albert, "he always has the best weapons to get out of the control of his Sovereign, which he dislikes."

But, with anxiety without and distrust within, Albert, as these letters show him, never for a moment faltered in carrying through what he conceived to be his duty. Whether it be sitting with good humour through a six-hour dinner, eaten by 150 mayors, or doing the donkey work of the Great Exhibition, the most bitterly criticised of all his plans and the most sensationally successful; whether it be writing reams upon reams concerning the conduct of the Crimean war or dashing off a note about the arrival of a new baby, still happily surviving as the Duke of Connaught—"rather blue, but now nicely pink"—the man must do it all himself.

The country was beginning to recognise his qualities when it was too late, but there can have been few men to whom the immediate job mattered more in itself, recognition or not.

He never ceased to pine for the scenes of his earliest days. He has the picture books of his childhood sent to him, and he remembers in the midst of all his distractions: "To-day is the day of the Rosenau harvest home! Happy time and honeycake!" He would like to be back, "because in a small home there is more heart to be found than there is in the big cold world."

In the last letter recorded in this delightful and enlightening book he writes: "I go on working at my treadmill, as life seems to me."

It is a conception of life which is losing favour, and no doubt rightly so; but it would be difficult to find more clearly portrayed than in these pages a man who was true, to the last gasp, to the conception of life which he thought the right one.

Christina of Sweden

Gustavus Adolphus, the Swedish conqueror, desired to have a son. When his child was about to be born, in December, 1626, it was incredible to the Court that one who had been so successful hitherto in getting what he wanted should on this occasion be disappointed. Therefore, when the child appeared, covered from head to foot with a caul from which a strident masculine voice made wail, some rushed to the King and told him that his prayer was answered.

Gustavus Adolphus drank his son's health and gave instant orders for his birth to be celebrated throughout the Kingdom.

The mistake, meanwhile, had been discovered; the child was a girl, but for a long time no one had the courage to tell the King. When he knew, he took it in good part. He gave orders that, "apart from virtue and modesty," the girl should be brought up as though she were a boy.

The celebrations went forward precisely as though a boy had been born. She was heir to the throne. Sweden knew nothing of queens save as the wives of kings. The ruler, whether man or woman, was King. In due time this child, Christina, would be her Majesty the King.

It happened that Christina was one of those women, not so few as used to be supposed, in whom a strong masculine streak is innate. Her training for kingship developed all that side of her nature to an intense degree, and made of her at last a being at once domi-

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nant and ineffectual, a woman who was feared because you never knew what she might do next, but who, in the long run, did nothing at all.

She was "not unlike a heavily-laden goods train—without an engine." The phrase is from *Christina of Sweden* by Margaret Goldsmith, and it will do as well as another to summarise the queer figure that Christina cut in those days when Cromwell was kicking crowns about in Britain and Louis XIV was learning from Mazarin in France how attractive can be their glitter.

A troublesome thing, a crown. When at last she succeeded to one Christina did not know a moment's rest. Cromwell or Louis? The crown's aggrandisement or the crown's decay? It was characteristic of the forcefulness with which this strange woman could do nothing at all that she abdicated; that is to say, she had the strength to impose on herself a tremendous ordeal whose outcome was simply to leave the matter in other hands. She gave the crown to her cousin.

But much was to happen before then. Christina grew up loving her father, the grim warrior she seldom saw, and hating her mother whom she saw too much: one of those women who are like icicles: a constant dribble of tears from a core completely cold. She was exercised in all manly skill, in riding and shooting and fencing. She fell upon learning like an army falling to the sack of a city.

Her father being killed in battle, she had been proclaimed King, though not crowned, before she was eight. By the time she was fourteen her advice was listened to in council, and though schoolmasters were still employed for her instruction, "her mental processes were so thoroughly wound up that she went on learning on her own intellectual momentum." Her mind, indeed, was by now "more highly developed than the minds of most of her courtiers"; and before

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long she was to have a European reputation as "the Swedish Pallas Athena."

She was convinced that she was a physical freak. She laughed about her own ugliness which her fool-mother had drilled into her; though there is testimony that, though no conventional beauty, she had a glorious voice and the charm of variety and vivacity. She was incorrigible with her clothes, wore anything anyhow; she swore like a trooper, loved a doubtful jest; and before she was much older she dismissed her maids and installed a man as valet.

She began literally to sack the world for knowledge. Shiploads of books arrived from Italy; scholars went about Europe with a roving commission to buy up libraries. She maintained a correspondence with learned men of every land, and cohorts of pundits were quartered on the Court, that she might wrangle with them in every tongue.

Descartes was her greatest capture. He died on her hands. She could do with no more than a few hours' sleep, and she would have the poor philosopher on the intellectual dog-track at 5 a.m. He couldn't stand the racket, caught pneumonia, and died.

She would discuss anything but marriage; courtiers concerned about the succession tried that road again and again and found it barred. She had not long been King before she threw out the first hints of abdication, and when at last her mind was made up she went inflexibly through with her plan. She decided that "It is a far greater happiness to obey no one than to rule the whole world," and so there came that great scene in the coronation chamber at Upsala.

To the Court and the officers of the army and the foreign ambassadors entered this woman not yet thirty, usually so ill-attired but now clothed upon with all the majesty of a throne. The Royal robes were on her, and the crown was on her head.

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She alone was resolute in the wondering assembly. She made a short speech, and then she asked that someone should take the crown from her head. No one moved. She appealed to two individuals; they remained whether they were. Then, with a firm hand, she removed the crown herself, curtsied to her cousin, now the King, and left the room.

Within three days, dressed as a man, with her hair cut off, calling herself Count Dohna, she rode out of Sweden. She became a Catholic, and entered Rome riding on a white horse, "with riding breeches elaborately embroidered in gold and a man's hat with a large plume."

For another thirty-five years she was a European peep-show, interfering and ineffectual at any point where the broth was boiling. She died with nothing done in any direction that her life had essayed.

This is the most rounded picture I know of this extraordinary woman; but Miss Goldsmith, not an amateur book-maker, deserves a scolding for the slipshod fashion of her writing. On page 290 we read that "the cardinals were to decide for whom, *amongst their midst*, they would cast their vote." Their "votes," I think; and "amongst their midst" is almost a classic enormity. The punctuation has been sprinkled in with a pepper-pot, hit or miss.

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## *Marie Antoinette*

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Maria Theresa, Empress of Austria, was sure of many things, but of nothing more than this: that she was a good mother. "All the world knows my devotion to my children," she wrote on one occasion.

Her devotion had scope for exercise. The children numbered fifteen, and a creditable number of them (for those days) survived infancy. There were six little archduchesses running about the palace, and they were all Marias.

Maria Antonia was the youngest. She did not live to become very old. She is known to history as Marie Antoinette. The guillotine struck off her head a week or two before her thirty-eighth birthday.

There are those who will tell you that Marie Antoinette was consumed by a monster which she had helped to create, that she was a wildly extravagant woman whose excesses provoked inevitable reprisals. Frenchmen, in particular, are willing to hand to Marie Antoinette a large share of the responsibility for unloosing the tigers of the Terror. Now, as in her day, she is "the Austrian," and it is always nice to have a foreigner to blame.

There are others to whom the death of Marie Antoinette was not retribution, but immolation. Among them is Mrs. Katharine Anthony. To Mrs. Anthony little Maria Antonia has all the attributes of pathos. She was the living sacrifice to Maria Theresa's "mother-love."

The difficulty about Maria Theresa's love was that

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you could not get away from it. "Mother knows best." And what the Empress deemed best for her youngest daughter happened, strangely enough, to be that which she deemed best also for the Austrian Empire. There was need for understanding with France. Louis XV had a grandson aged fifteen; Antonia was fourteen. The rest followed.

So, by her mother's devotion, Antonia was driven from home. She was at the age when a girl to-day would be leaving for boarding-school; she was uneducated, or, as her tutor had tactfully written, "her vivacity and frequent inattentiveness handicap in spite of herself her wish to be instructed."

Her mother did not think it necessary to go with her, but her brother accompanied the carriage for fifty miles. Antonia went on alone. Now let her sink or swim. In her ears lingered the sound of weeping. The population of Vienna, lining the streets to see her go, was moved by premonitory emotion. The small girl in the carriage failed somehow to fill the bill as a bride going forth to meet the bridegroom: it was almost as though the people saw rather the tragic queen's first step towards the scaffold.

On an island in the Rhine the outposts of the French Court met her. Thereafter the procession grew, picking up here equeuries, there ladies in waiting, here again the Master of the Robes. The pomp and circumstance of Versailles thickened round the lonely child till at last, at Compiègne, she met its crown and summit—the Bourbon family. Among them was the Dauphin, the boy Antonia had come to marry. "He stood with his grandfather and two brothers, a pillar of lethargy. On his heavy but slightly feminine features rested not a trace of expression. A pair of pudgy hands protruded from the lace ruffles of his sleeves. The contours of his large body

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did not suggest even the strength that there was in it, and it sagged heavily upon a pair of feet that shuffled as he came forward to greet her."

A few days later they were married. Marie Antoinette wrote her name with difficulty in the register. "Her signature had the pathetic look of an honest child doing its best."

So the gates of Versailles closed on the Austrian girl. She never saw her mother again. Her brother paid her one visit some years later. For the rest, she was left, alien as Ruth, to the tender mercies of a husband who had not desired her, a country which learned more and more to dislike her, a Court which, for the most part, delighted to catch her tripping.

Queen at eighteen, hers was a tarnished inheritance. The glory of Versailles had dimmed. The habitation of le roi Soleil had become the lounging-place of bored sots. The populace which came to stare, as it was permitted to do even on such august occasions as a royal birth, was to be pardoned its growing doubt concerning the divinity of kings. If for long Versailles had been something of a circus, it was at least a show that demanded "presence" in the ring-master; and Louis XVI, heavy, oafish, and banal, was a disappointing reward to a drop-jawed gazer from Normandy or Lorraine.

It is small wonder that Marie Antoinette withdrew into a life of her own. Whatever dreams or ideals had sustained the young head that bore its fourteen summers bravely through the gates of Vienna, it was clear that France wanted none of them, wanted none of her.

She made her own friends, and she "made" them in more ways than one. She sought her own diversions, light, hard, and meretricious. She sought and found her own love. How deep the affair with Fersen went Mrs. Anthony, though she makes full

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use of the new Fersen documents, will not venture to guess.

It was when the storm broke that Marie Antoinette put on the crown of immortality. Mirabeau said: "The king has only one man on his side, and that is his wife." That was an exaggeration; there was Fersen, at least, who organised the flight that ended at Varennes; and how differently that might have ended if the king had been a man on his own side! What he was is dramatically illustrated by the diary he kept while he was being hauled back to Paris. It is a record of meals and of the beds he slept in. During that same journey Marie Antoinette's hair turned white.

That was the last ride they took together. Nearly two years dragged by before Louis took his solitary ride in a tumbril. Marie Antoinette's came eight months later. She was always light on her feet, and she almost ran up the steps to the guillotine.

The Regent and His Daughter

Before George the Fourth was either King or Regent, he was a baby; and in that capacity—though, alas! never in any other—he was completely satisfactory. So satisfactory that he was placed in a bassinet behind a golden grille, through which forty ladies at a time were allowed to peep at him.

The odd-faced little German princess who was his mother was “so enchanted at having created him,” says Miss Dormer Creston in *The Regent and His Daughter*, “that she had him modelled full-length in wax, and kept this effigy lying on her toilet-table on a crimson cushion under a bell-glass.”

This was not the only occasion on which his effigy was made in wax. Many years later, when the child had become a man, obese, gouty, unwieldy and morose, another German princess fabricated his form in wax. She was Caroline, the daughter of the Duke of Brunswick. She was also, when she made the effigy, Princess of Wales, the Regent’s wife. But she was not living with him. She had not lived with him for a long time.

“On any evening when alone with her ladies-in-waiting, she would make a little wax image of the Regent, stick pins into it, and then burn it—the age-long recipe of black magic for injuring one’s enemy.”

Caroline and George were first cousins, but they had never met till she came to England to marry him. Lord Malmesbury was given the thankless job of

bringing her from Germany. He found her to have a "light and flighty mind" and no fixed character. She was losing her teeth; she wore "coarse petticoats, coarse shifts and thread stockings, and these never well washed or changed often enough." She had so little use for soap that sometimes it was "unpleasant to be near her."

Malmesbury had to drop some hints about the Prince's taste in women. He knew what those tastes were. He knew about the episode of the exquisite Perdita, the Prince's first mistress. He knew that the Prince was married to Mrs. Fitzherbert. He knew that he was then living with Lady Jersey, gracious and gallant, though a grandmother. Perhaps he, least of anybody, was surprised when the Prince, introduced to Caroline for the first time, "turned round and walked from her down the room; then, calling Lord Malmesbury up to him, 'Harris, I am not well,' he said. 'Pray get me a glass of brandy.'"

Still, there it was. Married already or not, the Prince had to marry this Protestant princess. That was the condition on which his enormous debts had had their heads cut off once more (but they always came up again from the roots). The Archbishop of Canterbury did what was necessary, and the bridegroom, so the bride told Lady Charlotte Campbell, "passed the greatest part of his bridal night under the grate, where he fell, and where I left him."

Caroline did her duty by producing a child nine months after marriage, and three months after that she and the Prince of Wales parted for ever. But we continue to have glimpses of her doing her best to get some fun out of life. We see her at Woolwich "in a gorgeous dress which was looped up to show her petticoat, covered with stars, with silver wings on her shoulders, sitting under a tree, with a pot of porter on her knee." We see her driving in her

coach through London and a man pushing up to the door, shouting: "God bless you! We'll make the Prince love you before we've done with him!" Alas! democracy has its limitations.

But that man was voicing a national feeling. The people did not like this way of treating a wife; and they feared that the daughter, Princess Charlotte, was not being treated properly either. The Prince took charge of the child, and strictly rationed the time she was to spend with her mother. It was, says Miss Creston, "as if Charlotte were a mail coach, timed to arrive and depart at a fixed hour."

Charlotte grew into a high-spirited but repressed girl, her household composed apparently of bores and spies. So jealous was the Regent of the applause which greeted her whenever she showed herself that at last her condition amounted to imprisonment. No parties; no dances. She is bullied even because she wants her coach to be green instead of yellow. One night she ran away in a hackney coach.

Small wonder that she was ready to marry the Prince of Orange. "The Frog" Brougham called him—Brougham who was fomenting her discontent in order to annoy "Prinny"—the Regent—whom he loathed. London was full of Royalties just then. The long wars with Napoleon were over, and Kings and Emperors and generals had come with all their train. A youth named Leopold had come on the staff of Alexander of Russia; and while the Frog was living at his tailor's, Leopold, handsome, experienced man of the world, ambitious on £200 a year, was quartered over a greengrocer's shop.

And then Charlotte staggered the Regent, staggered the country, by sending the Frog packing. And Leopold took his chance. He soon exchanged his £200 a year for £50,000 as husband of the Regent's daughter; and Charlotte came through that long

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nightmare of oppression into the happiness of Claremont with a man she seems genuinely to have loved.

And now it would have seemed that anyone might bet that this indigent youth would be the father of a king of England. No one would have dreamed that his sister would be the mother of a queen of England. But that was Fate's queer trick. Charlotte bore a son—dead; and herself died in the bearing. Leopold's sister became the Duchess of Kent, and her daughter's name was Victoria.

This book of Miss Creston's is a fine achievement. The Regency was a time singularly rich in incident, in personality, and in memoirs. All those memoirs are the colours on a palette from which Miss Creston has painted a picture pulsating with life and energy. She has given us a Regency Cavalcade. Brummell and Brougham, Eldon and Fox and Sheridan all come to life and play their part. Byron limps by, slinging his darts at Charlotte's gouty tyrant. Palace intrigue and public tumult whisper and shout through the pages, and we hear the rumble of the great war that swayed hither and thither through Europe.

We see the Regent—before he was the Regent—taking his seat in the Lords in a black velvet coat ornamented with pink spangles and shoes with red heels. We marvel at his Arabian Nights entertainments: the silver fountains playing on the table, the splashing water falling into little lakes and flowing down, between his hundreds of guests, in a bright canal in which roach and dace bobbed about. We see him process through every extravagance to a more and more desperate struggle with stays and laces. And somehow we admire the man. He was prodigious! We understand how little Miss Hayman felt when she wrote: "Never had anyone such captivating manners. I could have sat down and cried that he is not all that he ought to be."

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## *Napoleon in Retreat*

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During a long part of the retreat from Moscow, Napoleon travelled by sleigh. "The aged box, which had once been red, had been set on a sled and had four large windows, or rather panes of glass set in worm-eaten frames which did not close properly. The joints of this carcase, three-quarters rotten, gaped on all sides, and gave free access to the wind and the snow."

Therein the Emperor sat; and although he was "dressed in thick wool and covered with a good rug, with his legs in fur boots and then in a bag made of a bear's skin, yet he complained of the cold to such an extent that I had to cover him with half my own bearskin rug. Breath froze on the lips, forming small icicles under the nose, on the eyebrows, and round the eyelids."

The man who was in this "cage," as he calls it, with Napoleon was Armand Augustin Louis de Caulaincourt, Duke of Vicenza, the Emperor's Master of Horse. Never, said Napoleon at one point of the journey, rallying Caulaincourt gaily, never had subject been so long closeted with his sovereign.

Caulaincourt himself realised that; saw how important to posterity might be the conversations that took place in that cage that once had been red, that now was leaky and moth-eaten, hurrying through the bitter northern days and cruel northern nights.

The Emperor talked and talked. He liked Caulaincourt, who had the guts to oppose him resolutely at

many points. No "yes-man," this Caulaincourt. He had been Ambassador to the Russian court. He had opposed tooth and nail this mad march upon Moscow. He let fall remarks "which directly attacked Napoleon's ambition and his passion for war."

Napoleon would be in turns fierce, sulky, affectionate. To Caulaincourt's reasoned statements he would answer with a series of barks: "So they want to dictate to me!" "They want to make war, I tell you!" "I know the tricks of the trade." "You know nothing of affairs."

And, of course, he got his way. As in a modern instance, there was no declaration of war. The army just poured into Russia; and even when they were in Moscow, amid the sinister silence of the deserted town, with autumn well advanced, still Napoleon regarded Caulaincourt as a nervous old woman.

This winter weather the man was always warning him about! Why, it was as mild as at Versailles! "So this is the terrible Russian winter that M. de Caulaincourt threatens the children with!" he joked.

And the faithful Caulaincourt continued at all points to speak his mind. He saw Napoleon hang on in Moscow, hoping to force a peace, while Alexander in St. Petersburg sat tight, waiting for the arrival of his dread ally, Winter. He urged his sovereign to clear out, and Napoleon cleared out in his own good time, which was too late.

Then the Emperor saw fulfilled all that Caulaincourt had prophesied. He saw the horses, whose shoes were unprovided with ice-nails, falling and unable to rise; he saw the starving troops carving up those poor beasts for food while yet they lived; he saw the bivouac fires which the frost-bitten men

dared not approach lest the heat kill them; he saw that even in the forges the cold was so intense that the farriers worked with gloves on.

He saw ruin on all sides, and the army straggling home, harassed by the Cossacks, stupefied by the weather, "emaciated, bloodless, like spectres."

And then, so that his own presence in Paris might be some counterbalance to the tales of disaster that were reaching the capital, he left the army behind; and there he was hurrying along in his draughty cage with the man who had foreseen all.

And as he hurried he talked of glory, and said he was tired of tents and looked forward to the time when, a simple good man, he might live in peace within his own frontiers.

At every opportunity Caulaincourt noted down what the Emperor said; and those notes, which were amplified to five hundred and twenty sealed packets, stored in a black box, have been ever since in the possession of the Caulaincourt family.

They are only now made public. An excellent translation by Mr. Hamish Miles—*Memoirs of General de Caulaincourt, Duke of Vicenza, 1812-1813* is the first to reach this country.

It is an historical document of the first importance. It presents a vivid first-hand portrait of Napoleon: both the body and the mind of him. You are present in that deplorable coach as he talks and talks, his mind ranging in an impressive sweep over all the problems and personalities of the day.

Fleeing as he is from the scene of a stupendous disaster, pig-headed and short-sighted as he is proved to be in that particular matter, there remains none the less a sense of greatness, a depth of dynamic personality, an imaginative apprehension of causes and effects linked from one end of Europe to the other, a forward reaching of the mind to the problems that

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 statesmen must face when he was dead and gone, that is deeply impressive.

One is almost persuaded that for all the good Caulaincourt's care, for all the hiding of his papers, Napoleon knew what his Master of Horse was at. One can almost imagine that he was consciously dictating his testament, so that men of the future, opening this book, might say, as they will: "Napoleon speaks."

Catherine the Great

Of all the little German States which were the fecund breeding-ground of dynasties few were more insignificant than Anhalt-Zerbst. But out of Anhalt-Zerbst came Catherine the Great.

She was born in 1729 and was named Sophie Auguste Fredericke. The name by which history knows her was given when she was baptised into the Greek Church in Moscow.

Sophie made no bones about a small matter like changing her religion, because Sophie the Nobody wanted above all things to be Catherine the Somebody. There have been many opinions, and there always will be many opinions, about Catherine the Great. Even concerning some of the outstanding facts of her life there are widely differing views. On such a vital matter as this: whether her husband was the father of the child who succeeded her on the throne of Russia, we can do little more than make a guess after considering conflicting evidence. But when you have read Miss Gina Kaus's *Catherine the Great* there will be one point on which you can have no doubt whatever: that here was a woman who knew what she wanted and how to get it.

The little German girl who was hurried to Russia in a wretched coach, with frozen feet, with hardly a change of clothes to her name, was chosen by the Russian Empress Elizabeth to be a pawn in the game of kingdoms. The spirit of history must indulge in a wry smile when such a person as Catherine is moved on to the board as a pawn.

Elizabeth wanted a wife for Peter, her nephew and heir. He was a neurotic, feeble in body, a child in mind. His whole life and being was a negation. Catherine was a stupendous assertion. Intellectually restless, physically indefatigable, sexually omnivorous, she was mated to a man who at twenty-four kept regiments of tin soldiers and who would wake her up at night to play with the dolls that he kept in his bedroom. "I think I was good for something else," she grimly remarked.

It is not to be wondered at that when her son Paul was born people looked beyond the heir to the throne when seeking the father. Miss Kaus is of the opinion, without qualification, that the father was the handsome Saltikov.

What days those must have been for Catherine: those days when Elizabeth, whom she so much resembled, still ruled, when she looked about her and contrasted the little fief of Anhalt-Zerbst with the Muscovite splendour of the Russian Empire, when she thought of all the power and glory that might be hers and saw it qualified by the stupid boor through whom alone she might hope to have a finger in so rich a pie!

It is difficult to agree with Miss Kaus that Catherine had "essential nobility of character." But she did have a mania for power. She had a steam-roller personality that went over what was in the way; and her husband was in the way of her dreams. He was not long upon the throne before Catherine was a widow, an Empress. Russia was hers, a rich cake to cut for her lovers. Her essential nobility poured favours on the Orlov brothers, the pushful, bustling young officers who had removed Peter from the scene.

Whether the young Paul was Peter's son or no—that mad and gloomy Paul who was himself to die by

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an assassin's thrust—there must have festered in his mind a hateful certitude that Peter's crown was ripped from his head by a felon's hand. He staged a restoration in keeping with his grim humour. Before he himself ascended the throne, years later, he disinterred the bones, took them in procession through the streets, set the skeleton upon the throne, and placed the crown of Russia on the skull.

Peter was not the only man who stood in Catherine's way. There was the young Ivan, who had been crowned when six months old, deposed by Elizabeth when he was two, and who still languished in a fortress. A Pretender, a focus of rebellion, was not to Catherine's liking. Ivan died, stabbed by his guards, and in his case, as in Peter's, history can furnish pros and cons, and you can believe Catherine innocent or guilty.

Miss Kaus, who thinks Catherine a woman of essential nobility, also thinks that she at least condoned both these crimes. In what, then, does her nobility consist? She played with ideas of reform, attracted by the liberalism of the French philosophers. She even tried to put her ideas into practice, but the results frightened her. Better let Caliban sleep. She lived and died a despot. Miss Kaus would even excuse her scandalous amours, and so might anybody if the amours of an empress could begin and end in the bedchamber. But when we read that Zubov, the handsome darling of her old age, a spoilt insolent child, was made Inspector-General of the entire army, that "he handled the most delicate matters, dismissed and appointed Ministers of State," then that is another matter; then we cannot accept Miss Kaus's plea that Catherine did the work of a great man, "and she had earned the right to be excused the weaknesses of a great man." A great man does not resign great affairs to the management of a darling fool.

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But though on many points you may not agree with Miss Kaus's conclusions, you will enjoy the vigour with which she has made her points. She has written a glittering chapter in the story of an empire's decline and fall. Catherine did nothing to stop the rot.

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## *Leopold the Unloved*

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I wish someone would write a book about the Coburgs, that family of German princelings, ruling about as many people as there are in Wigan, having a territory across which, without tiring himself, a man might walk in a day, yet sending out its scions to be powers and principalities, the pickers-up of unconsidered kingdoms that blossomed into mighty states. The Coburgs had a pretty taste in crowns.

The story would have to speak of Stockmar, the family's phlegmatic Machiavelli; of Albert, who married Victoria; of his brother Ernst, whose portrait grins like a gargoyle in the just-published memoirs of the Queen of Rumania. It would speak of dashing young Leopold, who came to England in the train of Alexander of Russia, found the Regent's daughter engaged to an uncouth Dutchman, snatched her from under his nose, and received from the complacent English £50,000 a year as her husband.

How deeply he would have become entwined in our history who knows?—had not death-carried off his wife at her first child-bearing. The *accoucheur* committed suicide; Leopold shook up his dice again. Mexico offered him a throne; so did Greece; so did Belgium. He decided to oblige the Belgians.

He had a son, Leopold II of Belgium. Of him, too, the Coburg story would speak; and for the basis of his chapter our supposititious historian could hardly do better than turn to *Leopold the Unloved*, by Ludwig Bauer, translated by Eden and Cedar Paul.

The scandal of Leopold is hardly yet dim in the minds of middle-aged people. To most of them, the name Leopold is scandal pure and simple. Mr. Bauer, able after the lapse of a quarter of a century to stand back a little from the picture, sees more than a profligate, more than a greedy sucker-up of millions coined in a shambles. These things he sees, indeed, and sets them forth with clarity and vigour; but behind them he glimpses a Cæsar's personality, the last of the old-time kings, "a great man, dangerous and unique."

This man he has set himself to portray; and an excellent photograph permits the reader to imagine Leopold as he was in the flesh: the long rakish body, carelessly clothed, the great beard shaped like a spade, the twisted cynical mouth and the eyes whose malicious twinkle a monocle seems to enhance.

This is the man whom Mr. Bauer presents as haunted by dreams of Empire, pursued by a vision of his small country extending her bounds; the man who plunged upon the Congo when the innocent Stanley presented it to the cupidity of his age. With fair words upon his lips, we see Leopold encroaching steadily upon the land he was destined to torment: religion, humanity, and the advancement of science were the aims he professed to pursue; and step by step we trace the incredible process by which the Congo Free State came into being, not as Belgian territory but as Leopold's private property—what the author calls "the largest private estate in the world."

Stanley and other agents acting for the king had induced the chiefs to sign away their land. It was an empire "assembled with the aid of forced marches and glass beads." Legal authorities ratified the crosses which chiefs had put upon bits of paper; and thus was a state created which the other civilised states of the world recognised and acknowledged.

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Leopold entered upon his dominion, which he never saw, of 900,000 square miles, rich in rubber and ivory. He became master of 20,000,000 blacks, and when he died they numbered 10,000,000. In fifteen years he made "400 gold millions out of rubber brought from the Congo"; and it is the consensus of civilised opinion that never did money more abominably stink.

Mr. Bauer is not concerned to defend Leopold or the financial conditions which made possible his career; but he asks us to see him as a "symbolical expression of his epoch" and also as a king who sought personal aggrandisement as a means whereby his country might be great.

It is not easy to acquiesce in that opinion. When the denunciation of Europe at last compelled Leopold to relinquish the realm which his overlordship had drenched in blood and peopled with halt and maimed and blind, he handed it over to Belgium at a bargain price, and the bargain was on his side. He extracted the price of a thoroughbred for the old horse that his relentless driving had crippled and caused to founder.

He may have been true to a perverted notion of the divinity that doth hedge a king. The notion flowered in autocracy and defiance. His conduct to his wife was abominable; caricaturists represented his daughters as begging from the king's mistresses their cast-off clothes.

There was at least consistency in his contempt. He paraded his mistresses before his subjects; and his death-bed was watched over by a woman picked up in the streets of Paris. Before he died he married her, so that the peace of God might be conferred on him by the Church.

But, men being notoriously less forgiving than God, the state saw to it that the woman's son did not inherit the throne; and when she was ejected from

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the room where Leopold lay dead the populace pursued her and threatened to throw her into a lake.

On his death-bed Leopold achieved a final triumph. Compulsory military service for Belgium, which he had long desired, was hurried through to please him. The law was brought to him when he rallied from his operation, and his last contribution to his country's well-being was the "Leopold" that his dying hand scrawled upon it.

He was buried with royal splendour, and in the very mouth of the tomb hawkers sold to his loving subjects caricatures and lampoons which voiced the general view of the life now stilled within the splendid shell.



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### *Queen Marie of Rumania*

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A daughter of Alexander II, Tsar of all the Russias, married a son of Victoria, Queen and Empress. Among the children born to them was a girl whose portrait, painted by Millais, is at Windsor—a very attractive-looking little girl with long, rippling hair. She is knitting a sock.

Much might have been expected of a child in whose blood was united two incredible splendours: the dark, obscurantist splendour of the Romanoffs and the material splendour of the British Empire. But one thing you would not expect, and that is a frank, attractive book, a book in which a novelist's lively insight is given us by the little girl who eternally knits a green sock at Windsor. No royal person has ever written so frankly about royalties and the lives of royalties.

She is now the Queen of Rumania. Her book is called *The Story of My Life*. Volume I takes us up to her marriage. In it the glories of great courts, the restfulness of English country homes, the glamour of armies, the whispers of diplomats, the foibles of servants, the overpowering and sometimes overbearing presence of the great, all pass in review. You see a gardener's boy casting sheep's eyes at this princess at the very time when her destiny was being arranged; you see her shyly thrusting a present upon him before setting forth on the long journey that was none of her choosing.

You read her conclusion of the whole matter:

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“We were brought up in a fool’s paradise, carefully guarded from reality. Our world was delusion.” And again: “Our education had been based upon nothing but illusions and disillusion and a completely false conception of life . . . a sort of trapping of innocence, a deliberate blinding against life as it truly is, so that with shut eyes and perfect confidence we would have advanced towards any fate.”

Fate had long ago begun to arrange the Princess’s destiny. Prince Charles of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen had become King of Rumania, and had married that Princess Elizabeth of Wied who achieved fame as “Carmen Sylva” and of whom a startling and ironic portrait is presented in this book. They had no son, and therefore Ferdinand, son of King Charles’s brother, had been taken to Rumania to be trained for the throne.

Queen Marie gives us a picture that is almost tragic of the handsome young prince, to whom she was introduced when she was sixteen, whom she married when she was seventeen: a shy young man “who tried to overcome his timidity by laughing.” She met him in Germany, and when he talked of Rumania, to which he must soon return, “there was a sound of chains about it.”

So they met. “I lived in the castle of my illusions, and in my happy innocence I had no idea that everything had not been a romantic play of chance.” But that was not her mother’s view. “When princesses are over twenty,” she said, “they begin to think too much.”

It was because another young man was being trained as a ruler that the little princess found herself in Germany. The Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, brother of Victoria’s Prince Consort, had no heir. Victoria’s grandson, brother of this Princess Marie, was in Coburg to learn the ropes. Nowhere in the

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book is the author's pen more brilliant than in its description of that amazing Gothic creature, the Consort's brother. She portrays this "tyrant, ruthless and indifferent to the feelings of others" with a lavish brush. "An old beau, squeezed into a frock-coat too tight for his bulk and uncomfortably pinched in at the waist. A sallow face marred by liver spots, a lean waxed moustache curving down over the corners of his mouth, the ends turning up again. The jaw of a bulldog, the lower teeth protruding far beyond the upper, and with a pair of bloodshot eyes alive with uncanny, almost brutal, intelligence."

He rioted with his mistresses, while his wife, "a drooping, sad-looking old lady in shabby black," was thrust away into one room under the roof. She wore "a large cameo brooch with the effigy of her husband holding together a cashmere shawl over her flat and stayless body. A weak, grisly beard covered her chin and two kindly bleared eyes protruded above a depressed-looking nose, hopelessly pear-shaped."

Whether she is dealing with the great beauties of the Russian court, with *poseuse* "Carmen Sylva," with the shy old man who taught her to ride in Hyde Park, with the Kaiser or with Queen Victoria, the author's portraits are all equally vivid, frank and unforgettable.

Everything has stuck in her mind. She remembers how a small Winston Churchill was brought to play with her and her sisters. "I do not think that Mamma considered that he improved our manners." She remembers "the sly look of his eyes, with a snub nose set very pugnaciously between them and his impudent expression when reproved."

She remembers Queen Victoria living at the core of a breathless hush, and the Kaiser with boisterous spirits beneath which lurked "something of the bully always ready to break through," and "Cousin

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George," reliable in kindliness, always ready to soothe the troubles of "Poor, dear little missy."

She remembers the grand wedding, Protestant and Catholic and civil, and how, soon afterwards, she lay in a little bed and cried, and then she saw her mother looking round the door.

And for months afterwards "devoured by loneliness and homesickness in that far land, the memory of Mamma's brave face all wet with tears came back again and again . . . so that often I had to smother my mouth in my pillow not to call out with grief and longing."

So the small princess accepted her destiny. *Noblesse oblige.*

Cœur de Lion

When the twelfth century was on its last legs, in the month of March, 1199, a peasant went out to his work in the fields about Châlus, which is not far from Limoges. His ploughshare turned up a treasure: a great golden table, and about it an emperor and his family, all in gold.

King Richard, known as the Lion-Hearted, was lord of a territory reaching from Northumberland to Gascony; and that takes Châlus in its stride. He claimed the treasure; and the Lord of Châlus told him to claim away. It was a salutary way they had in those days, else they would hardly have had a bone left to bite on.

Look at this Richard, for example. England had been bled white for him. First to finance the long years of his Crusade; then to find his ransom; once ransomed, he was away on his wars again. He wanted money, money, money; and the golden table of Châlus meant a little bit more. So off he went to get it: a huge romantic fellow, six-foot-four, with a flaming red head and a mouth full of strange oaths. "By God's teeth!" he would shout; and "By God's leg!"

Forty men held Châlus against him; and one of them was a bit of a playboy. While the crossbow quarrels came hurtling against the parapets, he stood there with a frying-pan in his hand, and with that contemptuous shield turned aside the darts, laughing. Did he know what he was doing? Did he know that this

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was the sort of fooling that Cœur de Lion loved? We cannot tell. We only know that, whether by intention or not, it lured the King to the front row of the stalls.

Then the man with the frying-pan fitted a bolt to his crossbow, sent the thing buzzing, and achieved what three hundred thousand Saracens had been unable to do. "It was a good shot," says Mr. Clennell Wilkinson, in *Cœur de Lion*, "and we have it on the best authority that Richard paused to shout up a word of approval—like a spectator at a cricketmatch—before ducking behind his shield. That action, so typical of all that was best in his character, was now to cost him his life. He ducked a fraction of a second too late."

Richard died, ordering that the man with the frying-pan be left his liberty and given a hundred shillings. But the man was put to death.

It is a romantic Richard that Mr. Wilkinson presents. He is not prepared "to accept the dull verdict of the Victorian historians who, in their instinctive revolt against the pageantry and romance of history, have vainly tried to persuade the world that the real significance of Richard lies not in his foreign wars but in his 'lavish recognition of municipal life' in England." There has been a danger, he feels, of being "left with a Richard I, but no Cœur de Lion."

So he has set out to give us the hero of "Ivanhoe"—the "great Crusader, great adventurer, great sinner, and great hero." I wish him luck of his effort, because Richard certainly does not hold the place in men's minds that Mr. Wilkinson supposes. "He is the only one of our medieval kings," he writes, "whose name means anything to the commonalty of England to-day." I should say that his name to nine hundred persons in a thousand is nothing but a name, a far-off

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reminiscence of a time vaguely supposed to be heroic; and it passes my imagination how any historian can write, as is written here, "His name is still held in affectionate remembrance in every cottage home in England."

It is a pity that Mr. Wilkinson's own romantic affection for Red-headed Richard should lead him into an assumption so nonsensical. A canvass of the "cottage homes of England" would discover far more interest in Charlie Chaplin and Norma Shearer than in Richard and Queen Eleanor, and far more affection for them, too.

We may, indeed, ask what reason there was for the "cottage homes," even of Richard's own time, to be particularly excited about him. Consider a small matter which befell when he was journeying to the Holy Land. In a cottage he saw a falcon, liked it, walked in, and took it. A crowd objected; Richard refused to give up the bird; stones began to fly; a knife was thrown; "whereupon Richard seized the man and beat him with the flat of his Crusading sword until the weapon broke."

"An enjoyable little scrap, no doubt," Mr. Wilkinson comments, "but not perhaps quite dignified." And not perhaps a perfect inducement for cottage homes to be crazy about the King.

Mr. Wilkinson gives us in this book a fine living picture of Richard, but he leaves me unconvinced by his conclusions. It is Richard's Crusade which, especially, sets his mind burning. "But for that great inspiration," he says, "Richard might never have risen above the ruck of turbulent twelfth century war lords, the froth and scum of chivalry"; and he presents him as one fired by a profound moral resolve to surmount the circumstances of his time.

He has failed to sustain his own view of his hero. That Third Crusade was riddled through and through

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with secular and nationalist ambitions; and Mr. Wilkinson's own pages show how unspiritual was its inducement, how near to wrecking it suspicion and distrust came again and again.

It was a showy effort, full of the colours that romance has seized on. It was a war with all sorts of pretty appurtenances: silken tents and splendid armour and a foe with a name for chivalry. There was the customary expectation of loot. Before setting out, Philip of France and Richard "arranged, and put their names to it, that they would divide equally between them any treasure or any gain whatsoever acquired by them in their Crusade."

The Crusade left England for four years without a ruler; it failed in its objective; and though it established Richard's prowess as a man, this retelling of the tale seems to me to leave where it was his reputation as a king—"a king," as one historian has written, "equally profuse and rapacious. Not one useful measure can be placed to his credit."





*Men and Women of Letters*



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## *Charles Dickens*

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Mr. Stephen Leacock begins and ends his book, *Charles Dickens* with the highest praise that one mortal can bestow upon another.

On page 1 he says, "One stands appalled at the majesty of such an achievement. In the sheer comprehensiveness of it, no writer in all the world has ever equalled or approached it. None ever will."

On the last page, having spoken of "Shakespeare, a man—or a collection of men—of far lesser genius," he concludes: "In due time it will be known that the works of Charles Dickens represent the highest reach of the world's imaginative literature. This at its lowest is a poor thing, a tale told by an idiot. At its highest, the world's supreme achievement in art."

So there you have it. If Mr. Leacock has not used the word "art" loosely, it appears that in his opinion Dickens stands above Leonardo da Vinci and Beethoven and Shakespeare and everybody else. In our own time there are people living who have looked upon the lineaments and heard the voice of the greatest artist the world has known.

It is a stupendous claim; but it goes deeper even than appears on the surface. None "has ever equalled or approached it. None ever will."

Note that. "None ever will." Having cast a cosmic eye upon the centuries in all their manifestations, and having set the antennæ of his sensitive intuition quivering into the far reaches of futurity, Mr. Leacock has spotted the supreme artist of time

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past, present and to be. An august judge, sitting at the confluence of all æons, he has awarded the red rosette. There is nothing more to be said about it.

Abandon hope all scribblers upon paper and daubers upon canvas. You are foredoomed, be you as good as Shakespeare or Michael Angelo, to nothing more than second rank. The author of *Winsome Winnie* has spoken. So be it. Amen.

Well, I find this all rather silly. Even so good a Dickensian as myself—and I have stood his ground against barbarous Meredithians and misshapen Moores and jaundiced Jamesites and Joycians—even so good a Dickensian as myself must give a deprecatory cough and assume that Mr. Leacock is speaking in a purely Pickwickian or Leacockian sense.

When a claim so high and mighty as this is made, one expects at least an attempt to substantiate it. There is no such attempt in this book. Something must be added to our knowledge of Dickens, or to the interpretation of Dickens, before we can be asked to see him in quite so shining a light. Nothing is so added here. The book is a not too well-written restatement of old knowledge; and there is no pretence of critical estimate.

When I say the book is not too well written, I mean in no book should we find a sentence like: "Of instruction Dickens never had had any." And no Dickensian can claim to be in good standing if he calls the great Vincent Crummles Mr. Crummels.

Some of Mr. Leacock's statements and some of his judgments leave me confused. When, for example, he is telling us about the love Dickens, as a boy, had for the theatre, he says: "The theatre (not the classic stage of Shakespeare and Racine) left a deep mark on the thought and the work of Dickens."

What does he mean by the "classic" stage of Shakespeare and Racine? Shakespeare is as romantic

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as Haddon Hall, and Racine as classic as Chatsworth. How can any writer claim sensibility when he yokes Juliet and Bérénice to pull along a statement of that sort? One begins to understand how he can dismiss the writer whose Falstaffs and Bottoms and Doll Tearsheets were out of the same immortal stud as Pickwick and Micawber and Mrs. Gamp, as a man "who wrote about kings." Was Shakespeare ever more shabbily treated than by such a woeful perversion?

Many of the things which Mr. Leacock likes very much I dislike intensely; though likes and dislikes, of course, are personal things. But I do not see how David Copperfield's Dora can be called "famous among the heroines of fiction." Mr. Leacock is obsessed by the annoying little nincompoop. "Old maids and jealous women," he says, "have formulated the idea that Dora was a doll. Men have not dared to contradict. Yet the real masculine judgment is that, if these are dolls, let us have more of them."

He finds her "charming and unique, unsurpassed in fiction," one of Dickens's "chief creations, never forgotten by any reader." I should think that if all Dickens's character-drawing had been on the level of Dora, his books would never be remembered by any reader.

It is only personal taste, or prejudice, or what you like, that leaves me unmoved by the death-beds of Paul Dombey and Little Nell, both of which move Mr. Leacock very much.

A good deal of emphasis seems to me to be put in this book on the wrong things, not only where Dickens's work is concerned but where his life is concerned too. The story of Dickens's separation from his wife is gone into at some length, and I do not see that anything more is proved than was known before and could be very simply stated: that Mrs.

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school and thence to the University, he never knew a home. Ten years of his early manhood were spent as secretary to Sir William Temple.

In a country house in Surrey, with Temple, his wife and sister for sole company, and each of them at least forty years older than himself, it is small wonder if Swift felt some lack of the human touch, small wonder that his eye occupied itself with a charming child eight years of age who was the daughter of Mrs. Johnson, the servant of Temple's sister.

Swift was twenty-two when first he saw the child who lives for ever as "Stella"; he was sixty when her impending death drew from his heart the cry: "I am of opinion that there is not a greater folly than to contract too great and intimate a friendship, which must always leave the survivor miserable." He had twenty years to live thereafter, and miserable indeed the years were.

Who was this child of whom Swift was to write: "I have nowhere met with a humour, a wit, or conversation so agreeable, a better portion of good sense, or a truer judgment of men and things"?

We cannot expect now that the truth will be definitely known. There are reasons for supposing that she was Temple's illegitimate daughter, and Mr. Gwynn is tempted to that view. We know that when Temple died he left her a small legacy and that she went to live with one of his poor relations, Mrs. Dingley.

This, then, was the child whose education Temple's young secretary took in hand; and so close knit were their ties that when Swift had become a parson in Dublin and, by Temple's death and her mother's remarriage, Stella was left to her own resources, she and Mrs. Dingley settled in Ireland.

The relationship between Swift and Stella is the most romantic and the most baffling of the world's

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love-stories. They were never known to sleep under the same roof. Whenever he was away, she and Mrs. Dingley occupied his house; whenever he was at home Stella tended to his wants and was a wife without a marriage bed.

When great affairs called him to London (and the tale of his absence was told in years), he poured out his heart and mind in the *Journal to Stella*, inventing that language of endearment in which she became "Ppt.," which meant "Poor pet," and he "PDFR," which meant "Poor dear fond rogue."

That she would have married him any day he asked her there is no reason to doubt; and then fate delivered him to a woman who did not wait to be asked. In London he met Miss Vanhomrigh, the "Vanessa" of his verse, and if Stella was all that tranquillity and loyalty could mean in his life, Vanessa, twenty years his junior, was passion's very self, a burning flame that would not be denied. There is good ground for thinking that she was not denied.

Swift committed the dreadful mistake of concealing from each of these women the existence of the other, and when he, newly-created Dean of St. Patrick's, returned to Dublin, Vanessa put the fat in the fire by following him.

Vainly the poor man urged discretion upon her. She replied with molten letters, protesting that her whole frame was blinded with love. There are different versions of the crisis. One is that Vanessa wrote to Stella demanding to know whether she was married to Swift; that Swift took the letter, flung it upon Vanessa's table, and left her without a word. All we know certainly is that a few months later she was dead, having bequeathed the greater part of her considerable fortune to a stranger.

And had Swift married Stella, as Vanessa suspected? There is no proof, and in her will Stella called herself

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"spinster," but some of Swift's closest friends accepted a current belief that the two had been secretly married by the Bishop of Clogher.

Married or not, their lives were maintained on the same queer footing till Stella's death, soon after *Gulliver's Travels* had been published, Swift being then just about sixty years old.

Disappointed in his hopes of taking a great place in the London world, yet famous wherever men were fit to be called civilised, Swift ended his days in the exile of Ireland. Dark and terrible was his latter end. At fifty he had said, pointing to a stricken elm, "I shall be like that tree, dead at the top."

And so it was. Ironically, he had bequeathed what fortune he had for the amelioration of the lot of the insane. He spent his last three years under restraint in his own deanery, snatching at the food that was placed for him, a long white beard growing on the haggard face that had been smooth and round. For a few coppers, it is said, the servants would allow the curious to peep at the ruin of a mighty man.

Ironical, too, has been his fate in the world of letters. *Gulliver's Travels* which struck beyond the foibles of individual aberration at the dignity of humanity itself, has become a fairy-tale.

It was the fort from which Swift fired the bitter salvo of the ultimate despair. Now, despoiled of its armament, breached so that the sunlight falls upon the broken embrasures whence its venomous darts were hurled, it has become a playground for children; and the fate of the world's most savage satirist, who did not want children near him, is to be by them linked in one thought with the gentle Hans Andersen as they run in and out of the ruins of Swift's Castle of Giant Despair.

Baudelaire

In the 'forties of last century Paris boasted a fine crop of bucks and eccentrics. There was Gerard de Nerval, leading his lobster through the public parks on a pale blue ribbon; there was Dondey, who kept his spectacles on at night so that he could see in his dreams; there was Barbey d'Aurévilly, the least of whose accoutrements was a hat with a wide black brim, trimmed beneath with crimson silk.

And there was Charles Baudelaire, more buck than eccentric, flaming his way through the two brief years which were his springtime in the far country, a spring that was so quickly to decline into a long winter of misery and despair.

For Baudelaire earthly things were soon to be no more than symbols. His clock became so pregnant with horror that he removed the hands; but the very face remained the monitor of mortality, the shepherd of his straying years, rounding them swiftly to the abyss of dissolution. And if he leaned his ear from the window above his Paris street, it was not the steps of passers-by that fractured the silence; even the wind then was too corporeal for his drained and sifted senses: it was the Night itself that he heard: *La douce nuit qui marche*.

But now he was twenty-one, beautiful as few men are beautiful, and possessed of a personal grace and charm which, said Banville, kings and princes used once to possess, but whose secret has now been lost.

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He wore a tight-fitting sky-blue coat with gold buttons, a primrose-coloured waistcoat, pearl-grey trousers. In his apartments he surrounded himself with lovely things : old furniture, fabrics that soothed the eye and charmed the touch.

In a third-rate theatre he found a beautiful dancing-girl, a mulatto, named Jeanne Duval, and he made her his mistress, setting her as the crowning-piece in his collection of choice things. "She glided in and out of the room," says Miss Enid Starkie, in *Baudelaire* "with extraordinary feline grace, with the tortuous and sinuous movements of a Javanese dancer. . . . Banville said that there was something in her divine and at the same time bestial."

Blind, paralysed, debauched by drink and drugs, hobbling along on crutches, Jeanne Duval was to pass at last out of history, ending in what obscure kennel no one ever knew; but now she was young, and Baudelaire was young; the tune was gay, and little they thought that the piper must soon be paid.

Baudelaire's father died when he was a child; his mother's second husband was an army officer of rigid mentality, a man destined to do well, to be an ambassador, at last a Senator. Aupick was a just man, but his stepson was something completely outside the range of what he might be expected to understand. It was with relief that Charles, when twenty-one, pocketed his inheritance and followed his star.

The inheritance was small—£3000; and when at the end of two years debts began to accumulate, Aupick and Baudelaire's mother stepped in and took the course which, in the poet's opinion, ruined his life. It was found that in two years Baudelaire had spent £1500 of his capital and, in addition, run into £1000 of debt. This was hardly "spending fantastic sums of money," as Miss Starkie calls it; it was not expenditure on the grand scale; but it was enough to

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sink Baudelaire for good and all. The whole tragedy lies in the contemptible smallness of the means that brought it about.

The family obtained legal power to impound the £1500 that remained and to appoint a guardian to administer it. For the rest of his life the most sensitive spirit in Europe had to have his thirty shillings a week doled out as to a child; and those who imposed that condition on him left untouched the problem of the £1000 debt. Baudelaire was left to wrestle with that alone on his £75 a year.

Before his death the thousand had become £2000. It was ever before him, a growing monster. If it had been killed at the beginning Baudelaire's whole life might have been a different thing, and we should probably never have had the poems that were wrung out of the heart of his misery.

Hurled by this one blow from the cheerful opulence of a grasshopper in a summer field to the hard status of a toiling ant, he began to dress the part. His long hair and beard were cut off; he put on black clothes and never for the rest of his life wore anything else; his jolly face turned to the set and rigid mask whose burning eyes glow beneath the tremendous brow in the frontispiece of this book.

Henceforth his life was a tragic struggle not only for the recognition of his genius but for the very means to keep body and soul together. Proud as Lucifer and touchy as a thoroughbred, he was ill-equipped to do the one or the other. He would quarrel about a comma, hurl his sarcasms at the heads of those who held the keys of preferment. When completely beggared he wrote to an editor who suggested a change in an article :

"Since childhood I have formed the habit of considering myself infallible."

He infuriated publishers by his inability to deliver

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work on the nail, proceeding with the production of an article or a book with the unhurried precision of a carver of gems.

It took him five months to correct the proofs of his great work *Fleurs du Mal* and this, by which he thought at last to breast the flood of circumstance, was the greatest disaster of all. It was condemned for obscenity; and "Baudelaire," which he hoped he was writing on the forehead of fame, became a byword kicked about in the gutters.

Things never righted themselves. He found a little work on those precious periodicals that tickle esoteric ears for an issue or two and then expire; his publisher failed; his very mother, who loved him with a hopeless yearning that some day he would "make good," took to returning his letters unopened. In a bitter moment he accused her of siding with those who stoned him.

He sank to the depths. He lived in foul lodgings; he was afflicted with premonitions of madness; diseases whose seeds were sown in youth began to take their toll. Mingling with the outcasts of the human race, he acquired a profounder voice, touched with the eternal sorrow of those who from the abyss look up to inaccessible stars.

Through it all, with a grand interpretation of *noblesse oblige*, he clung to Jeanne Duval, whom he had long since ceased to love, sharing the bread of poverty with one who had no one else to turn to. He besought his mother to care for Jeanne when he was dead, but Mme. Aupick did not see that she had obligations in that matter.

Baudelaire was forty-six when he died with his head resting on his mother's breast. His hair and beard had grown again in his last illness. They were snow-white. The elder men of letters kept aloof in death as in life. Neither Sainte Beuve nor Gautier was

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present when the earth was hurried into the grave and the mourners rushed home from the rain that fell in torrents. But some of the younger men knew what that earth covered. Already Verlaine was calling Baudelaire "the Master."



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*Trial By Virgins : a Life of Rossetti*

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At Holmer End towards the middle of last century there lived an old gentleman named Gaetano Polidori. He had married an Englishwoman named Pierce; and they had a daughter, Frances Polidori.

Frances married an exiled Italian patriot, Gabriele Rossetti; and in due course a grandson came now and then to visit old Polidori at Holmer End.

There was a pond in the garden, and little Dante Gabriel Rossetti might be seen sitting on the edge of it. Mr. David Larg, who writes *Trial by Virgins*, tells us how the child was occupied. He was "holding a frog in his hand. He knew what was going to happen. It had happened before. Always it distressed and interested him. After a little time the lack of moisture made the animal's throat split across. Then with great tenderness Dante replaced the dead frog in the pond."

The thing might be a parable of Rossetti's treatment of Elizabeth Siddal. He lifted the wretched girl from her miasmatic environment; she distressed and interested him for a number of years; and, finally, with great tenderness, he placed her in a coffin, with his poems meshed in her hair.

That is one way of looking at it; but it is not Mr. Larg's way. Miss Violet Hunt's *The Wife of Rossetti*, published last year, breathed death and damnation on the poet; Mr. Larg's book is an apologia. The books are complementary. Miss Hunt's contained what she knew of some of the facts

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of the case; Mr. Larg's is an interpretation of a wider range of facts.

An apologia is not an apology. Mr. Larg does not attempt to apologise for Rossetti. He seeks to make him acceptable because he was what he was. And as he sees him, he was a man who sought to reconcile life and art, and in the pursuit of that aim was completely ruthless and realist. The words that Ruskin addressed jointly to Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal may here be aptly quoted with especial reference to Rossetti: "I don't say you do wrong, because you don't seem to know what *is* wrong, but just do whatever you like as far as possible—as puppies and tomtits do."

The diagnosis is startlingly accurate, though one would prefer to see a little more lash in the tail of it. "As tigers and pythons do" would have been nearer the mark.

Rossetti's amazing ability to extract what he wanted from those who surrounded him and then to drop them for more succulent prey comes out all through the book.

His family discovered early that their task was to foster his genius. While his plodding brother William was bringing what he could each week to the meagre exchequer, Dante was a drain upon it. Madox Brown, bedevilled by poverty, working in a slum, where his studio was "a barn overrun by rats," was taken up so long as Rossetti thought that Brown had anything to teach him; then he was dropped for Holman Hunt.

It was not long before Hunt himself was dropped. Rossetti walked out of a contract to pay half the rent. Hunt had to find it out of a slender pocket.

Then there was Aunt Charlotte. He had touched her for the money to pay Brown for some lessons, and she could usually be relied on in a crisis. It was she

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who, when all the virtuous Rossetti ladies gave Elizabeth Siddal the cold shoulder, sent the girl a warm shawl; and who, when Rossetti could not pay his rent, obliged with twenty-five pounds.

Sallow and dirty as he was, there was a force in this young man with the fleshy lips and mesmeric eye—a force that few people could resist. It overcame Ruskin completely. The great man would drive down from Denmark Hill to Rossetti's frowsty place that looked out upon the Thames at Blackfriars, and there he would encounter things that set his fastidious teeth on edge.

Things like Madox Brown, who had evidently just risen from sleep on the sofa, rubbing his eyes and belching clouds of tobacco from a foul pipe; or a breakfast table littered with the meal's debris at noon; or the completely irregular position of Elizabeth Siddal.

Rossetti's genius made Ruskin swallow all his scruples, and, what was more to the point, buy a lot of pictures. But Ruskin—the nearest thing the Victorians had to the B.B.C.—would have dearly liked to see this Siddal business righted. He wanted to help Elizabeth as he would “a beautiful tree” or “a bit of Gothic” (and Ruskin couldn't say fairer than that!); and he even suggested delicately to Rossetti that, if money stood in the way of marriage, he could soon put that right.

What did stand in the way of marriage? It is the question that all writers of Rossetti come up against. There was the girl—not perhaps what we should call a beauty to-day, but the “type” that set the painters of Rossetti's day gabbling eagerly: a red-headed, world-weary type, the type that suggested, for that day, the synthesis of all those impossible attributes of mood and form that poets and painters dreamed in Woman.

With some violence perhaps to Mr. Larg's delicate

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and skilful analysis, one might sum up his view in the phrase that Elizabeth Siddal's tragedy lay in her being, for Rossetti, Woman, and not a woman. She was the Virgin that went into Pre-Raphaelite stained-glass windows; she was the Damosel who leaned on the gold bar of Heaven. For human nature's daily food Rossetti had the woman across the water at Wapping. "She was the ally of Elizabeth. He came back from her with a friendliness that did them both good."

And then the perfect model "changed her pose." A sudden fit of jealousy drove her to "tell him that she just wanted to be beside him, on any terms." She tried to substitute herself for the illusion that Rossetti had cherished concerning her. They married, and two years later Elizabeth was dead.

Mr. Larg leaves it at the coroner's verdict of "accidental death." He says nothing of suicide, nothing of that terrible slip of paper which Miss Hunt says was pinned to the dead woman's nightdress: "My life is so miserable I wish for no more of it."

He has worked out his own view of Rossetti and he has embroidered his story with rich illustrations of the time through which Rossetti passed to his wife's disaster if not to his own. All the members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood are here in rounded, jolly pictures; Ruskin is as large as life; the Italian raggle-taggle that infested the house of Rossetti's father show up with all the colour of a fruiterer's shop against the grey in which Christina fortified her thin-lipped virginity.

It is a crowded book, and through its forest of men and women Mr. Larg has put Rossetti a-prowl, burning bright.

James Boswell

If it had not been for a Scots dominie who thrashed his boys excessively we might never have had Boswell's *Life of Johnson* and the *Tour to the Hebrides*.

The dominie was sacked. There was litigation. The case was sent from Scotland to the House of Lords; and James Boswell, an Edinburgh advocate, had to make an appearance in London.

If the Devil himself had been asked to prescribe for Boswell at that moment he would undoubtedly have said: "Send him to London." He came to London, lost his soul, and found immortality.

The year was 1772. Boswell was thirty-two. He had recently married; and marriage, says Mr. C. E. Vulliamy in his *James Boswell*, had brought about "a period of reform and settlement."

Goodness knows, reform and settlement were necessary. Already the droll-looking, fat-faced son and heir of the Laird of Auchinleck had established a reputation for drunkenness and lechery beyond the stomach of even those tolerant days. He was to better that reputation; but already it was substantial.

You never knew what he would be at next. One day you would find him at Covent Garden lowing like a cow, to the great delight of the audience; that evening you might see him reeling out of a Fleet-street tavern with a consequence that was inevitable when Boswell was drunk—a night spent in the stews.

The next day you would behold his remorseful

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ravings—his shuddering apprehension of the shameful diseases to which he laid himself open. You might see him, when his head had cleared a little, wander into St. Paul's and there vow solemnly before God that he would not touch drink or woman again—that he would be “a solid, uniform, exemplary character.” Then he would take his “piteous, owlish face” around to Dr. Johnson's and seek to imbibe some stability in the shadow of that great rock.

What did the Doctor think of him? If we could but know! This was one of the strangest friendships in the complex history of human relationship: the friendship of the old man who was like a mountain with the young man who was slippery and unstable as the scree on a mountain side. “Whether to love you be right or wrong,” wrote Johnson on one occasion, his mind clouded by a doubt, “I have many on my side.” On another occasion he packed Boswell off to Scotland after a London visit like a rumpled parcel, with a letter to Mrs. Boswell: “He has led a wild life. Pray take care of him.”

The first meeting had taken place when Boswell was at his best—such as it was—and Johnson, having taken a fancy to him then, never let him down.

In this delightful book we see Boswell as clearly as Boswell has enabled us to see Johnson. We see his insensate determination, founded on abilities the most slender, to be a famous man of letters. We see his impertinent intrusion upon anyone who was great. He called upon Rousseau at Motiers dressed in a scarlet coat and waistcoat, trimmed with gold, buckskin breeches, a green great-coat lined with fox fur, a hat decorated with what looked like solid gold lace. He had written to introduce himself—and no doubt he thought it was all true—as “an ancient Scots gentleman . . . of singular merit.” Having done with Rousseau, he thrust himself with astonishing

effrontery upon Voltaire at Ferney and argued with him about the Bible.

It was an amazing scene. "The aged frame of the Patriarch shook with devilish excitement, until he reached a stage of real or assumed collapse: all at once he fell back in his chair; he was motionless, with eyes closed. Instead of pulling the bell-rope, the young visitor sat there and watched him with curiosity. Voltaire came back to life, and young James was ready for him: 'Now, sir—the Master of the Universe—the soul—immortality—judgment——'" He wrenched from Voltaire the admission that there might be such a thing as soul.

He called upon Paoli, the Corsican patriot, sang "Hearts of Oak" to the Corsican troops, indulged in a bout of indecency with Rousseau's mistress on the way home to England, and appeared in public thereafter with some frequency, calling himself "Corsica Boswell" and wearing a dazzling Corsican uniform complete with stiletto and pistol.

Such was the man who had one chance in a million that marriage would steady him. Then came the fatal journey to London, and thereafter Boswell's story is one that makes even a reader's ears burn with shame in contemplation of disintegration so lamentable and so complete. A hopeless drunkard at 30, showing signs of premature age at 36, he died at the age of 55.

He did not spend all this time in London. He was up and down to Scotland a good deal. Mr. Vulliamy does well to dispel the notion that Boswell was Johnson's constant companion. He points out that during the whole friendship of 20 years there were only two years and five months of scattered occasions during which Boswell and Johnson could have been in contact.

There is much in this commendable book to which one would like to call attention: the vivid sense of

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period; the flashing glimpses of Garrick and Reynolds, Goldsmith and Wilkes; the delightful descriptive touches such as that in which we see the two strange friends setting out on their memorable journey to the Highlands, Johnson, apprehending savages, armed with pistols, and Boswell with a Bible and *Ogden on Prayer*. Mrs. Boswell, meanwhile—poor woman, what a life was hers!—was wringing her hands in the background. And all through there is the sense of this brazen little Barnum leading his educated elephant here and there, calculating the kudos he will one day acquire from noting its trappings and trumpetings and tusings and the quaint way it eats its buns.

But, above all else, attention must be paid to Mr. Vulliamy's estimate of the character of Boswell. He will not have it that Boswell was a fool, though he admits the truth of much else in that terrible thrashing that Macaulay administered: "Always laying himself at the feet of some eminent man and begging to be spit upon and trampled upon . . . without delicacy, without shame, without sense . . . a dunce, a parasite, a coxcomb."

The final difference between Mr. Vulliamy and Macaulay seems to lie in this: that, admitting the facts on which Macaulay based his judgment, Mr. Vulliamy asks us to bear in mind one mitigating circumstance, and that is inherited insanity.

Sane or insane—judge for yourself. You will not find better matter on which to base your judgment than this book gives you, for in it James Boswell lives and breathes, the bridle off his tongue, the brake off every impulse, rake, drunkard and boaster, the very soul of indiscretion.

Mark Twain

The reputation of Mark Twain has become concentrated and consolidated with the passing of the years. While he lived, and for some time after his death, his legend was gigantic. It was an inchoate mass which time has cooled and lessened; to-day we see it hardened and brightened into two enduring stars, *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*. Let the rest go. These remain, imperishable. So long as the Mississippi flows they will shine above it with an inextinguishable beauty.

Mark Twain needed to be dead before the truth about him could come alive. His personality was generous, compelling, devastating to a critical estimate. It was impossible to believe that anything which such a fellow wrote could be second-rate, third-rate, no rate at all. He belonged to the age when great men had a knack of seeming greater and looking greater than they were, when acting meant Irving, and cricket meant Grace, and politics meant Disraeli and Gladstone.

But it wasn't an easy life for those great individualists. They created, as it were, their own caricatures, and the public expected them to be true to their own exaggerated image. Mark Twain with his aureole of flaming red in youth, of venerable silver in later years, with his whimsical mouth adorned with a corn-cob pipe, with his eyes that were like points of light on steel, with his lean carcass and lean, drawling speech, was cast as a funny man, and funny he had to be.

Those who remember nothing else of his last visit to England remember the famous joke about the Ascot Gold Cup. They forget that the real reason for the visit was to receive the degree of Doctor of Letters from the University of Oxford. They forget that he was an old man who had known luxury and bankruptcy, who, when he should have been taking his ease had worked like a horse to pay off his creditors, whose beloved wife had died not long before, and who, on returning to America, had little to look forward to except the downward slope of the hill. But he cracked his last famous joke on English soil and got his laugh.

There were times when the trick did not come off. In *Mark Twain* Mr. Stephen Leacock tells us of such an occasion. The circumstances could hardly have been more august. Whittier was seventy, and a dinner was given in his honour. Longfellow and Emerson and Oliver Wendell Holmes were there, and Mark Twain was afraid of them.

"In their eyes and in his own he was not in their class. They were 'authors,' real ones; he was just a rough, cheap Westerner." Contrary to practice, he wrote his speech and read it carefully. "If he had given it to the students of Yale and Harvard," says Mr. Leacock, "it would have taken the roof off." He used the word "bummers." You can imagine Emerson's eyebrows going up and the facile Holmes looking down his nose. They never got over that word. Mark Twain's face "turned to misery. The speech ended. The old men shuffled into their coats. It was all over."

Mark Twain actually wrote letters of apology to all those imitations of Englishmen of letters—he who alone that night was the authentic voice of American creative literature.

Mr. Leacock has no room in his book for more than

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a swift etching of his hero, but it is an etching full of fascinating virile strokes. We see a restless, unlettered youth taking hold of experience with both hands. As a printer, as a pilot on the Mississippi, as a miner and newspaper man he roamed the West when it was authentically wild, and the whole thrilling panorama of it seeped and soaked into his mind, saturating it with the rich essence that he squeezed out into his two great books. It is strange that the creator of those two works, broad and deep as humanity itself, should still be regarded by so many as just a fellow who wrote funny stuff.

To talk funny stuff was to Mark Twain a deeper agony than to write it. He was immensely popular on the platform, but he hated lecturing. "He wanted to be a man of letters," says Mr. Leacock, "a philosopher, a character—he didn't want to be a comic man. 'Oh, Cable!' he moaned to his lecture-mate one night, 'I am demeaning myself. I am allowing myself to be a mere buffoon. It's ghastly. I can't endure it any longer.'" But, on the other hand, he would have been deeply hurt, as at the Whittier dinner, if people hadn't thought him funny.

He was compounded of mixed elements. The jester was also a man of profound and passionate convictions. He once wrote an article called "God, Ancient and Modern"—an "elemental, defiant" article Mr. Leacock calls it, but his wife would not let him publish it.

All his work after marriage was censored. His wife, a pious woman whom he loved profoundly, and the Rev. Joe Twitchell, for whom his affection was great, combed it carefully, taking out all the knots, leaving a smooth caressable texture.

But for that, we might have known more about the real Mark Twain—a man of "flaming enthusiasms, fierce elemental passion against tyranny, against

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monarchy, against hell, against the God of the Bible."

The fineness of the man came out when bankruptcy brought his world in ruins about his ears. For years money had poured in in streams, but he had spent in rivers. He backed inventions that came to nothing and refused Graham Bell's offer to let him in on an invention called the telephone! He ran his own publishing house, and that was what got him down. It failed for 100,000 dollars. The creditors were offered 50 cents in the dollar, and, like Walter Scott in similar circumstances, Mark Twain said it wasn't good enough: he'd pay the lot.

That was in 1894. He was nearly sixty years old; but in six years he had redeemed his promise. Once again he took on his shoulders the hateful yoke of lecturing. He stumped the world, talking, joking, writing. He paid his debts and laid up a competence for old age.

Life was not kind to him. A man of rare family affection, he was fated to see his wife and three of his four children die before him. The third child, his daughter Jean, fell dead while dressing a Christmas tree in 1909. On Christmas Day Mark Twain looked out into the whirling snow, and said: "She always loved a storm like this."

The snowflakes were the last light push of a fate that had been pressing him hard. He could not stand up against them. He died the next April. For once the report of his death was not "grossly exaggerated."

D. G. Rossetti

On February 12, 1862, an inquest was held on Elizabeth Eleanor Rossetti, who had died the day before.

Swinburne had discovered a new restaurant, and had asked Dante Gabriel Rossetti to come along and dine with him, bringing his wife. The restaurant was in the Leicester-square region. Rossetti's wife was "queer" in the cab on the way to keep the appointment, and the dinner was a bit of a fiasco. Swinburne had had something to drink before the Rossettis got there; Elizabeth scolded him; Rossetti was displeased with Elizabeth, and took her home early. They lived at Blackfriars—at 14, Chatham-place—round about where Unilever House has recently blotted out so many landmarks.

They didn't quarrel in the cab on the way home, but there was a coldness. Elizabeth at once began to undress, and Gabriel said sulkily that he was going out. Then, as he went, the storm broke. Elizabeth hung over the banisters and shrieked and shrieked. "Go, then, and you'll kill this baby as you killed the last!" She had had a still-born child.

He came back a few hours later and found her dead. But everything went well at the inquest. It was known that Mrs. Rossetti, a consumptive whose health was dreadfully undermined, had been taking laudanum, and when Rossetti and Swinburne and the landlady and others had given evidence a verdict was returned that an accidental overdose of the drug had caused her death.

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But one piece of evidence did not come out at the inquest. Ford Madox Brown found pinned on the dead woman's nightdress a piece of paper on which was written : " My life is so miserable I wish for no more of it."

That is the sentence which Violet Hunt puts on the title-page of *The Wife of Rossetti: Her Life and Death*, written, she tells us, from "sources that are chiefly oral, from the circumstances of my childhood and early girlhood spent so much in the company of the actors in the scenes I am attempting to describe."

An episode which has become famous in its way followed the finding of the coroner's jury. When Elizabeth lay in her coffin Rossetti came into a room where his relatives and friends were gathered, carrying the little green book in which he had written "The Blessed Damozel" and his other poems. He made for the bedroom, beckoning Swinburne to follow him, and saying, "I have often been working at these poems while she was ill and suffering, and I might have been attending to her, and now they shall go." In the bedroom he "lifted the tiny, thin, lace-bordered napkin that undertakers bring to cover the face, and laid the book on the left side, between her hair and her cheek, sedulously averting his eyes, like a child that has been scolded."

"Sedulously averting his eyes"—the suggestion that Rossetti could not look his dead wife in the face—is Miss Hunt's contribution to this matter and comment upon it. She adds : "Gabriel never saw her grave, and left instructions that he was not to be buried in Highgate Cemetery in any circumstances whatever."

She says, too, that all Rossetti's group knew his poems by heart. The midnight exhumation, years later, would appear to have been a bit of unnecessary stagecraft.

Where did Rossetti go to when he fled down the

stairs that winter night with his wife's malediction ringing in his ears? Madox Brown, says Miss Hunt, "thought it was to Wapping." Wapping was the place where Rossetti's mistress lived—that bouncing, lively, illiterate Fanny Hughes—"with the full white throat flung back, lusty and fierce." "Fanny," says Miss Hunt, "was the only person that Gabriel knew well enough to leave thus cavalierly whilst half the love-night was still unspent." A comment not easy to reconcile with what one would expect of the circumstances.

It is a sad and piteous tale that Miss Hunt unfolds, a felon blow to the placid acceptance of Rossetti's as a noble love. Elizabeth Siddall, whom all her friends called Lizzy, worked in a hat shop. She first came to Rossetti as a model. Her family claimed antiquity, but they were down in the world. Lizzy was "more handsome than pretty, tall without being weedy, with big white arms and neck almost too columnar. Her eyes were blue, the colour of agate, and prominent, so that she could not have worn a veil without fretting the lids." Rossetti raved about her red hair. She was a great reader and something of an artist.

Rossetti knew her for ten years before he married her. She became his pupil as well as his model. "Living in rooms by herself, spending the rest of her time in company with one man, closeted alone with him for hours, for days, for nights, using his chambers when he was away, sleeping in his bed, yet unable to point to a ring on her third finger."

His friends and hers tried ever and again to bring him to the scratch, but for ten years he shied away. He would do anything for her but marry her: send her on holidays when she was ill, fit her up with a cottage at Hampstead, and almost always at someone else's expense. They quarrelled like cat and dog, bringing on paroxysms of her illness, and then the

sight of her sickness nauseated him, putting the thought of marriage farther off than ever.

He borrowed remorselessly from Madox Brown, and seemed to think it but his due that Mrs. Brown should be dragged back from a much-needed holiday to look after Lizzy, reduced to accustomed wreckage after another scene. He began to take a livelier interest in Lizzy's art when Ruskin gave her a fixed income on condition that she went on painting, but his interest waned when the subsidy ceased.

At long last he married her, and she found herself "a daughter of Heth, married into an alien tribe." Old Mrs. Rossetti and the frustrate Christina and her sister Maggie would not cross her doorstep, though Christina sent the happy couple a wastepaper basket a year after the wedding.

Whatever Elizabeth Siddall had hoped to get out of the marriage for which she had longed so intensely, she soon found that she was to get nothing at all. She sank down into a drugged peace, cheered a little towards the end by the devotion of the boy Swinburne, who would come to see her where she sat with her laudanum bottle and her crazily cooing doves hanging in wicker baskets round the room that looked out on the miasmal Thames. Later, when the dead child was born, she would sit there rocking the empty cradle, while in the outer room her husband made merry with his friends "and countesses rolled in their carriages to Blackfriars to see the Pre-Raphaelites in their habitat."

Gabriel was busy with his Fanny; he hadn't much time now for Madox Brown, grown a little seedy and gouty; but Brown, an angel of forbearance all through the tragic tale, had a last service to perform when he helped the shattered Gabriel to pull himself together and concoct a tale for the jury.

One feels all through the reading of Miss Hunt's



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story as though the bluff that came off then has been coming off too consistently ever since; as though we shall all have to make some readjustment in our view of Rossetti. May so much, after all, be forgiven a man for the sake of a few pictures and a few fine lines? We close the book with Browning's guttural in our ear: "I never can forgive Rossetti!"

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## Louisa Alcott

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In Miss Cornelia Meigs's book, *The Story of Louisa Alcott*, photographs of Louisa's father and mother are reproduced. From those two faces one might deduce the whole history of the Alcott family.

Amos Bronson Alcott has a faraway smile upon his face. It lights the eyes; it lifts the corners of the lips, so kindly and sensitive and ineffectual. It takes the whole world on trust.

The lips do not turn up in Mrs. Alcott's face. They turn down; they seem to be pressed down by an iron resolution. The eyes are unsmiling; they have seen too much. They are not looking on the ideal world that shines before Bronson Alcott's benevolent regard. They are looking on a world where potatoes have to be peeled when there are any to peel, where floors have to be scrubbed when there is soap, where clothes have to be made when material can be bought.

Clearly, the history of these two people is going to be the history of a husband flying like a kite against the blue, with a wife wearing her fingers to the bone to keep the thing attached somehow to the earth.

The Alcotts had five children, all girls. Louisa, who was to become famous as the author of *Little Women*, was born 103 years ago. *Little Women* is still a best-seller. It has outlasted hundreds of more pretentious books. There are many mansions in the household of the immortals. One of them is a nursery.

Louisa inherited her mother's mouth and chin.

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She was a woman of indomitable resolve, and all her resolve was for others.

Appalled by the ramshackle manner of life into which she had been born, by the drudging servitude of her mother, by the struggles of that ineffectual angel her father, she made up her mind early in life that these two, and all her sisters, should have a grand time some day.

She kept the vow. She wrote for no other reason than because she wanted money. She gave up everything that she might have had for herself in order to achieve that purpose. Losing her life, she found it.

You can judge the stability of a family's life by the number of houses it occupies. By the time Louisa Alcott was 28 there had been twenty-nine changes of residence. Her father was a visionary. Many of his visions, which were concerned with education, are now commonplaces, but they did not get him a living a hundred years ago.

Emerson said, "He might have talked with Plato," and others of his neighbours—Nathaniel Hawthorne and Thoreau among them—believed in him. But it was his long-suffering, hard-working wife who had to keep him going, bearing with his Utopian experiments, facing single-handed the battle of to-day in order that his mind might envisage the cloudy conflicts of to-morrow.

Single-handed till Louisa began to grow up. The circumstances in which that growing-up was achieved, the constant threat of the family's disruption, gave her a heightened view of the family's importance. She records how in a time of great trial she prayed: "Help us all, and keep us for one another."

"For one another" was the essence of Louisa's family creed. It was with her so great an obsession that when her sister Anna became engaged to be married she raged and lamented. She didn't want

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husbands butting in on the family scene. They had all been poor together; she wanted them all to be rich and happy together.

She undertook the lowliest labours in order to provide those creature comforts which she hoped would keep them all happily at home. She taught and she scrubbed and she nursed, but always it was by her pen, she felt sure, that the miracle would finally be achieved.

She was from childhood an indefatigable scribbler of high falutin' romantic nonsense. It was the American Civil War which taught her the literary value of the thing seen and known at first hand. From a Washington hospital where she was nursing the wounded she wrote vivid, unconsidered letters to her parents. They were never intended for publication, but they were published, and they were a success.

And then a publisher said: "What about a book for girls?" She didn't think much of the idea, but began to write. Once again she relied on the thing known. She told the now famous story of her own household.

And, believe it or not, the publisher was very disappointed. He hesitated, wondered whether to turn the book down, and took a chance.

The rest is the conventional fairy-tale ending: they all lived happily ever after. Louisa showered her blessings upon her father and mother, her sisters and her sisters' children. There were carpets for the floors, books for father, shawls for mother, trips to Europe for May. And when May married abroad, and died there, her little daughter was sent to America so that Louisa might begin all over again looking after other people.

It was a grand life. It was not merely that Louisa provided day-to-day things that her family needed: there was a pile of debts, too, the earthly minting of

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Bronson Alcott's heavenly visions. Louisa valiantly wrote "Finis" to all that.

She herself did not live to any great age. She saw her mother safely and comfortably off the earth as she would have wished to do, and one of her last acts was to visit her father, fast fading away. She caught cold on the way home and never recovered.

The old man died just before she did, so that in an almost artistically perfect fashion she passed out when that was done which as a child she had vowed to do.

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*William Morris*

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Next month we shall be celebrating—or not celebrating, as the case may be—the centenary of William Morris's birth. The most likely thing is that the customary little stir of dust will be raised about the great man's shrine, to settle the more thickly upon his effigy when the trampling feet have once more passed; and that will be that. For Morris's voice cried in a wilderness, and we are in the wilderness still.

William was born at a time when, as Mr. Paul Bloomfield reminds us in *William Morris*, children were plentiful at a penny a day and the "Hungry 'forties" were at hand. But to young Morris, growing up in his father's lovely house on the fringes of Epping Forest, absorbing Scott and cantering here and there on his pony in a toy suit of armour, all those things were but "rumours, emptied of concern."

His father was a commercial man of the prosperous middle-class. The fat had a way of flowing to his side of the pan. As though his comfortable business concerns were not enough, he had a miraculous stroke of luck. He accepted in settlement of a debt 272 £1 shares in a concern that looked no more than promising.

Soon those shares were worth £200,000!

The old man died when William was in his thirteenth year. There were many people to share the fortune; but William's share was big enough to ensure that he would never know privation. Within reasonable limits, he was free to frame his life as he liked.

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It took him a long time to make up his mind. He was at last to become an atheist, but he left Marlborough convinced that the Church was his vocation. Burne-Jones, whom Morris met at Oxford, was also set on the Church, but they changed their minds. Morris had begun to write poetry, but decided that, on the whole, he wanted to be an architect.

He worked hard at architecture, and then D. G. Rossetti persuaded him that it would be much nicer to be a painter, so he became a painter; and not long after that he discovered that what he really wanted to be was a decorator. And the way that came about was intimate and characteristic.

He met a girl named Jane Burden, whose father hired out hacks at Oxford. Jane was one of those statuesque women. It is not unlikely that modern irreverence would call her cowl-like and vacuous, but to the taste of those times she had a "majestic and moonlike loveliness." William Morris married her.

Many years later, when Morris had finished with Rossetti, and Rossetti, a fat and shabby drug-addict, had taken up with Hall Caine, Jane would make the long journey from Kelmscott to Cheyne-walk to dine discreetly with the man who has handed down to us her image in the canvas called "Proserpine." Hall Caine would receive a note: "The lady I spoke about has arrived and will stay with me to dinner. In these circumstances, I will ask you to be good enough to dine in your own room to-night."

But that was all in the far distance, when the fabric of life was ravelling out into distracting threads. At the moment all was integral and joyous. Jane and William set up house, and Rossetti and Burne-Jones and the other boys would come down and play loud, rollicking games and pelt one another with apples. It was grand fun, and they all called Morris "Topsy." It was a queer name for that great hairy Goth, who

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laughed and swore with equal vigour, was known to kick in door panels in his wrath, and was apt to find pert parlourmaids shutting doors in his face, for he would not wear hat or tie.

Out of that setting up of house arose the firm of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co., who called themselves "Fine art workmen in painting, carving, furniture and the metals." Everything that went into the house had been made by Morris and his friends. He hated the stuff in the shops. It was a wonderful age. People were getting things so cheaply that they were getting cheap things; so Morris decided to start a shop where things would not be so cheap but would be beautiful and good.

There is no space here to follow the expansion of Morris's opening venture. It was at last to embrace almost everything that man can manipulate: wall-papers and hangings, tiles, carpets, printing. The significant word in the designation of his company is "workmen." His life may be called a practical and literal expression of the prayer: "The work of our hands establish Thou it."

From this intense pre-occupation with the making of beautiful things it was a short step to Morris's political activity. Steeped to the elbows in dyes, stained with paint, odorous with the fragrance of carved wood, fluffy with the thistledown of the looms, inky from his printing press, he was both jack and master of all trades and exalted with the wonder of how consoling and fulfilling manual work can be.

Work is more satisfying than leisure, he decided, and, looking about him, found that for most workmen it was nothing of the kind.

Still, as one may figure it, wearing the suit of medieval armour in which he had played as a child, he hurled himself into a fight which he hoped would bring back a man's joy in his job. He tub-thumped in



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the rain; he sold papers in the gutter. He became more hairy, fiery and uncompromising as his friend Burne-Jones was carefully accepting a baronetcy and Rossetti was fading out in drugged dreams.

He was, anyhow, a man. It is permissible to doubt whether the cause with which he associated himself is particularly concerned to-day to give back to man his birthright of beauty. It may be doubted, too, whether, the tide of the Industrial Revolution having risen so high, Morris's gesture was more significant than Canute's. But I at least cannot withhold admiration from the man who made the gesture or suppress a wish that it had turned the tide.

He was buried on a rainy autumn day in the country that he loved. His tomb was designed by his friend Philip Webb. Webb said, "It will be a roof for the old man."

Charles and Mary Lamb

A London morning newspaper, dated September 26, 1796, contained a paragraph which began: "On Friday afternoon the Coroner and a respectable Jury sat on the body of a Lady in the neighbourhood of Holborn, who died in consequence of a wound from her daughter the preceding day. It appeared by the evidence adduced that, while the family were preparing for dinner, the young lady seized a case knife laying on the table, and in a menacing manner pursued a little girl, her apprentice, round the room; on the eager calls of her helpless, infirm mother to forbear, she renounced her first object and with loud shrieks approached her parent.

"The child by her cries quickly brought up the landlord of the house, but too late—the dreadful scene presented to him the mother lifeless, pierced to the heart, on the chair, her daughter yet wildly standing over her with the fatal knife, and the venerable old man her father weeping by her side, himself bleeding at the forehead from the effects of a severe blow he received from one of the forks she had been madly hurling about the room."

The newspaper, unaware that the mad-woman was destined to share with her brother Charles a unique niche in the temple of literary fame, did not bother to put on record that her name was Mary Lamb; but it tells us that the respectable jury "of course brought in their verdict, Lunacy." And it adds, in that little way newspapers have of trying to take a rise out of

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their rivals: "It has been stated in some of the Morning Papers that she has an insane brother also in confinement. This is without foundation."

However, the statement had this foundation: that during six weeks of the preceding year Charles was in a madhouse in the rural retreat of Hoxton.

Charles was twenty-one when Mary's mad action brought the world he had known crumbling about his ears. Till then it had been a quiet and comfortable world enough. The respectable indigence of his family had been mitigated for him by the kindly intervention of thoughtful friends.

There was old Mr. Salt, for example, the lawyer at whose house Lamb, Senior, was clerk and factotum. Mr. Salt seems to have permitted the boy the run of his books, and that meant a lot, we may assume, to one whose stammer would lead him not to seek much companionship among boys of his own age.

He wouldn't find much real companionship in the family circle. His brother John, whose one hold on history is that he knocked Hazlitt down flat during an argument about pictures, was twelve years older than Charles, and Mary was eleven years older.

So the books were useful, and at the right moment a place was found for Charles in the Bluecoat School; and down in Hertfordshire there was Grandmother Field, whom it was always pleasant to visit. She was a housekeeper, looking after a great house called Blakesware whose owners had moved to another house. So young Charles had the freedom of the empty rooms and spacious gardens and alluring fish-pond. At home there was old Aunt Hetty, a queer stick, who gave one night-fancies about witches and such-like things.

There were some interesting boys at school, too: that fellow S. T. Coleridge for one; and when school was done with, and old Lamb had left Mr. Salt, and

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the family were living in Holborn, Coleridge was still to be met for grand world-ranging talks at the Salutation and Cat in Newgate-street.

It can't have seemed such a bad life, then, to Charles Lamb, as he approached his twenty-first year. He had a job at the East India House; his brother John was well established at South Sea House; Mary was doing so well as a dressmaker that she was able to employ an apprentice. It was a pity that the old man in his dotage should have gone mad on cribbage and kept Charles at it when he would rather have been scribbling or sitting with Coleridge at the Salutation and Cat. But life on the whole was quiet, reliable, domestic.

And then, one September evening, Mary, who had been queer for some days, was so much worse that Charles decided that in the morning he would ask a doctor to see her. "It is idle to speculate," says Mr. A. C. Ward in *The Frolic and the Gentle: a Study of Charles Lamb*, "upon the difference that would have been made both to the Lambs' family history and to English literature if Dr. Pitcairn had been at home." He wasn't. Charles went on to the office, and when he got back the mischief had been done.

The whole family circle was broken up for ever. The mother was slain; Aunt Hetty went to live with a relative; Mary went to an asylum. Within a few years Hetty and old Lamb were dead, and Charles and Mary, John having turned his back on all responsibility, were making together the best they could of life.

Again and again the old frenzy came upon Mary, and she and Charles always knew when the dread visitation was near. "Lamb would take her," Barry Cornwall wrote, "under his arm to Hoxton Asylum. It was very affecting to encounter the young brother

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and his sister walking together, weeping together, on this painful errand; Mary herself, although sad, very conscious of the necessity for temporary separation from her only friend. They used to carry a strait jacket with them."

It is surprising that they made so much of life. They had hosts of friends; they entertained; they wrote and read; they gallantly refused to go down before a foe who would have annihilated lives less adequately furnished with resources.

It was not till middle age that Lamb, still working as a clerk, began to write those essays, signed with the name of Elia, that are the most humane and lovely things of their sort in our language. He was a ruminant. He chewed over his thoughts and encounters; the old lawyers, Aunt Hetty, the big house in Hertfordshire, his days at school: and he at last gave it all back seen through a veil of autumnal reminiscence that is as impalpably lovely as autumn's own bloom.

This is his centenary year. He was a few months off sixty when he died in 1834. He had hoped to outlive Mary, but she lived on for another twelve years. Mr. Ward has given us a worthy centenary reminder both of the little frail, stuttering man who fought a giant's battle with circumstance and of the writer who missed celebrity in his day, but is now acknowledged as the weaver of a magic that has never been matched.

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## Emily Brontë

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Lord Alfred Douglas in his *True History of Shakespeare's Sonnets* relies largely on the sonnets themselves to prove his case. While others seek for puzzles, anagrams and heaven knows what nonsense, he asks simply : " Does it seem reasonable and in the nature of the case that when Shakespeare says so and so he means what he says ? "

This same method has been used by Virginia Moore, the American author of the *Life and Eager Death of Emily Brontë*.

Miss Moore has studied here on the spot all that is known of Emily Brontë's life and environment. She has sifted most assiduously all the poems; she has discovered new poems; and she has succeeded in dating each piece of writing.

This dating is at the heart of the method, because if it is true that Emily's secret is manifest in what she wrote, then we should be able to see the poems agreeing at this point and that with the things which she was experiencing at this time and that.

So, throughout this long and deeply-interesting book, the poems are printed here and there, at the point where they are psychologically right; and Miss Moore does make us see with startling clearness that they are signposts, if ever poems were, along the road their author trod.

And what, mainly, do they indicate? Anyone who knows Emily's work at all, whether the poems

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or *Wuthering Heights*, knows, of course, the passion for freedom of body and soul that flows through them, the deep identification of the writer with all things stark and austere and unfettered. Emily was never happy away from her moors; and the writer of this book justly remarks: "The moors were a place: they were also a quality"; and it is elementary in any consideration of Emily Brontë to recognise that that quality was hers, that she and the moors were one in an indissoluble identity of pagan spirit.

This is a very masculine attitude: there is nothing feminine about the moors round Haworth, where Emily lived—those gaunt bones of rock clothed with a rough vesture of bents and heather.

Once this fact has struck you, you cannot fail to be impressed with the abundance of the testimony that Emily Brontë was a masculine character. Every one of her contemporaries who put an impression on record testified to the same thing. In the family she was called "The Major," and Charlotte spoke of "a certain harshness in her powerful and peculiar character."

Miss Moore has assembled many of these references. "Sometimes quite jovial, like a boy." "Stronger than a man." "She should have been a man" (this from the astute Professor Heger, of Brussels). "More like a boy than a girl." Her figure "looked loose and boyish when she slouched over the moors, whistling to her dogs, and taking long strides."

All these are the words of people who knew her, and there are many others pitched in the same key.

Bearing this in mind, the study of the poetry becomes profoundly interesting; and Miss Moore puts forward the hypothesis that in 1838, when she was a school-teacher near Halifax, Emily fell passion-

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ately in love, that her love was not returned, and that the loved person was a woman.

To make her case as fair as it can be, she devotes a chapter to examining everything that can be said against this supposition; and having put both sides, she suspends judgment, though it is clear to which side her own belief tends.

What is to be said against the method which she employs? Clearly, it is a method which cannot always, or indeed often, be used. Nothing is more reprehensible in criticism than the belief that a writer's words must be capable of personal interpretation. The spirit of an artist blows like the wind where it listeth, and occupies many mansions.

But there are occasions when this rule breaks down, and it is most liable to break down in those spontaneous cries from the heart that constitute the purest lyric poetry. Miss Moore uses a good and convincing phrase in speaking of one of the poems: "The fierceness of the accent proves autobiography."

And this study of Emily Brontë, which considers her not only in this regard but in all regards, presents a woman of so complete an integrity, a woman so incapable of dissimulation or finesse, so incapable of inventing any amelioration of what she grew more and more to consider the utter worthlessness of mere human existence, that one questions whether even the poet in her would have taken refuge in an imagined experience.

Her mind, anchored to a few barren acres of Yorkshire soil, could go up and down; it could comprehend Heaven and inhabit Hell; but it could not move sideways to explore the compromising kingdoms of the earth.

It is this fierce vertical passion, this concentration as it were of her emotions into a shaft between the heights and the depths, that made her one novel,



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Wuthering Heights, the only unquestionably and triumphantly great novel that a woman has written in English. To be superbly great in art seems a male prerogative; and, with Miss Moore's hypothesis in mind, one wonders whether it was the maleness in Emily that made her the spectacular exception.

Little joy she got from it all, save her own fierce pagan joy of identity with nature. Living in that bleak parsonage with ineffective Anne, and school ma'am Charlotte, and an ageing father, and a drunken brother, it is small wonder that she longed to be quit of it all.

Charlotte, pleased, as she well might be, by the success of *Jane Eyre* had no idea that *Wuthering Heights* soared above her best-seller as an eagle soars above a sparrow. Everyone was buying *Jane Eyre*. Few were buying *Wuthering Heights*; and Charlotte wrote complacently to a friend that her sister's talent "will not be seen in its strength till it is seen in essays."

She rather deplored *Wuthering Heights*, thought it a bit crude and not quite the thing; but she did have the sense to see that Emily's stark and fleshless poems were unique. "No woman that ever lived ever wrote such poetry before," she said.

But the public didn't want the poetry either. It had been published, with Anne's and Charlotte's, in a little volume, of which two copies were sold.

So Emily wrote with her customary pungency :

*I condemn
All the puny ways of men*

and settled down to die, which she did as uncomplainingly as she had lived, on her legs, crying "No, no!" when Charlotte and Anne tried to put her to bed.

Early Victorian Novelists

Lord David Cecil, who, not long ago, gave us an excellent study of Cowper called *The Stricken Deer*, has turned his attention to fiction. His new book is *Early Victorian Novelists*. He is a brisk and efficient sergeant-major. He knows, down to the last strap and buckle, every bit of equipment that the troops should possess. Here he has them on parade, gives them a run-over, and decides that, on the whole, they are a credit to the regiment.

What a squad! On the right flank and on the left flank a short-sighted fellow peers at you through spectacles. The one with the broken nose is Thackeray; the other with a beard and a benevolence that has something in it both Jovian and jovial, is Anthony Trollope.

In the middle of the squad is another beard, without spectacles. The restless little garishly-dressed jack-in-the-box who wears the beard is Charles Dickens. Two women stand between him and Thackeray. They are the Brontë girls from Haworth, Emily and Charlotte. They have, rightly, left their sister Anne at home. They did their best for her, but she was drummed out of the regiment long ago.

Between Dickens and Trollope stand two more women: Mrs. Gaskell, who was so much at home with the muffin dish and the tea-pot in Plymouth-grove, Manchester; and George Eliot, for whose description I must turn to Lord David Cecil himself.

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“That osseous lengthy countenance, those dank, lank bands of hair, that anxious serious conscientious gaze,” that “seem to sum up and concentrate in a single figure all the dowdiness, ponderousness and earnestness which we find most alien in the Victorian age.”

There they are, then; and please take note that in sifting out the significant writers of fiction of that time Lord David Cecil produces four women and only three men. Fiction is the one art in which women in England shot ahead as soon, almost, as the race began; and before the time of which we write Jane Austen had shot farther ahead than any of them.

But afterwards? In the next phase we see that they have not kept in the running. Hardy, Meredith, Henry James, Kipling, Conrad, Bennett, Wells, Galsworthy. But now that this group, too, is passed away (for Kipling and Wells have finished their work as novelists) now that all fiction-writing is second-rate, the women are in the running again, and, if anything, leading the field.

But since these early Victorian days of which Lord David Cecil writes they have not produced one champion to stand with the four he selects.

These seven novelists Lord David Cecil sees as the old “lawful and undisputed monarchs of literature.” Will they keep their places in a world in which “the learned and Olympian kind of critic speaks of them less often than of French or Russian novelists; while the bright young people of the literary world, if they mention them at all, do so with boredom and contempt and disgust”?

But what sort of court of appeal is this? Novelists do not write for critics, Olympian or otherwise; still less do they write for the bright young people of the literary or any other world. No; Lord David Cecil is right when he says of these super-abounding Vic-

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torians: "They write equally for the train journey and for all time."

There is no space here to give consideration to each of these seven essays. Let it be enough to say that the author has applied the most drastic tests to his chosen seven; he has exposed their vices as ably as he has assessed their virtues; and he has come down on their side. He finds in them a dynamic vitality which suggests to him an Elizabethan kinship. With the exception of *Vanity Fair* and *Wuthering Heights*, he thinks their works do not belong to the world's greatest novels—"that minute, final circle of the paradise of fiction."

"But though they are not the very greatest, they are great." Nor is the satisfaction they give likely, he thinks, to grow less in future generations.

The paper on Emily Brontë was the one that interested me most. Lord David Cecil gives her—rightly, I think—the highest among the seats of the mighty. "She has the most extraordinary imagination that ever applied itself to English fiction," he says. And again: *Wuthering Heights* "is the one perfect work of art amid all the vast varied canvases of Victorian fiction."

Lord David Cecil has not got Emily's setting quite right. He speaks of her life "in those days of slow infrequent communications, and before the industrial revolution," and says that Yorkshire was "essentially the same as it had been in the days of Queen Elizabeth."

Haworth in Emily's day was a busy industrial village, with a population of more than 6000, most of them working in the woollen mills. The industrial revolution was in full swing. Keighley, with its roaring mills, was only a few miles away, and from Keighley the Brontës could take train to Leeds or Bradford in pretty quick time.

But the moors around the parsonage on its bleak hill top were eternal, and it was to them that Emily turned her heart—the moors unchanged, not only since Elizabeth's time, but since they first etched the austere perfection of their lines upon the chaos from which they rose.

Musicians

Mozart

The good folk of Frankfurt, walking abroad in the August of 1763, stopped to read an announcement concerning a couple of young prodigies who were on show in the town.

The announcement spoke of the "universal admiration" which had been aroused by the "astounding genius" of these two children of Herr L. Mozart. It was promised that at the next and "positively last" concert, "the little girl, who is in her twelfth year, will play the most difficult compositions of the greatest masters"; and as for the boy, not yet seven, he would "accompany symphonies on the clavier, the manual or keyboard being covered with a cloth, with as much facility as if he could see the keys"; and he would, in addition, do all sorts of other things to please those with understanding and to tickle the groundlings.

The Mozart circus was on a grand tour, and Leopold, father of Wolferl and Nannerl, knew all the tricks of exploitation. "Evidently," says Miss Marcia Davenport, in *Mozart*, he had "neither the sense nor the pride to see that even real genius can be submerged in cheap sensationalism." So he dragged young Wolferl hither and thither, billing him as a "Wonder of Nature," and uneasy, as he wrote in a letter, lest the time should come when he would be an old man, "unable to undertake a journey, and Wolfgang of an age and growth that have diminished the wonder at his performances."


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He must make hay before that sad time came; and what a haymaker Providence had placed to hand in the person of Wolfgang, or, as the family called him, Wolferl! At Salzburg, where he was born, Wolferl was writing notes before he could write words. At the age of three he was tinkering with the clavier; at four his father began to teach him; at five music was the grand passion that burned up his short life. He was already composing bits and pieces. The first time he took a fiddle in his hand, never having had a lesson, he played it competently.

A "wonder of Nature," indeed; and the father, a lover and maker of music, should not be blamed too harshly. If he must rush the sensitive plant to any show that was going, at least, between times, he sheltered and cherished it.

Wolferl was a great musician, born ready-armed for any siege of beauty; but the thing was to make the world know it. A musician! What was that? Someone who might sit at a great man's table below the valets, if above the cooks. Patronage—that was the only way; a job at a nobleman's court, or, better still, an Emperor's.

So Mozart and his wife tore about Europe—Germany and Austria, France and England, Holland, Switzerland, Italy—carrying with them Wolferl dressed like a little man in stiff tailed coat, ruffs, silk stockings and wig. Jolting over appalling roads, sleeping in third-rate inns, short of rest, over-excited: it is small wonder that Wolfgang Mozart died at 35. The longest journey lasted for three and a half years, and the family got back to Salzburg no better off than when they set out.

That was the first phase of Mozart's life. The second was his journey to Paris. The old man could not go, but, intensely possessive, he would not let Wolfgang go alone. So Mrs. Mozart went to see

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that the boy knocked at the right doors, craved patronage in the right quarters. On the way, at Mannheim, Wolferl fell in love with Aloysia Weber. The mother mutely disapproved; the father wrote storming letters.

The Paris sojourn was a hell of misery. The French hated Mozart's gloomy, love-sick face, and he hated them in return, then and for ever. All his dumb, boyish resentment with his mother turned to gall in his mouth when she died on his hands in Paris.

At last, employment as far off as ever, he turned back home, calling at Mannheim on the way to cheer his weary soul with a sight of Aloysia. She had already forgotten him and become a rich man's mistress.

The last phase of Mozart's life was staged in Vienna. Thither he went at the age of twenty-five, and Miss Davenport loses nothing of the grim tragedy of those last ten years. Through the post the old man still tried to hold him, but Wolfgang at last cut free. He married Constanze Weber, Aloysia's sister—"a silly bubble of a girl," says Miss Davenport, "naturally flirtatious and coquettish."

By now Mozart's upbringing was taking its revenge. He was "a remarkably small man, very thin and pale," with a pouch under the chin, and protruding eyes. Aloysia said of him, when he had long been in the grave, "I thought he was only a *little* man," and Constanze thought so too. Haydn, whom Mozart loved, was one of the few who saw the truth. "The nations," he said, "should contend for the possession of such a jewel."

But the nations showed no disposition to begin such contention. He could find no work at the Imperial Court. Streams of immortal music were flowing from him; and his life was a nauseous welter of debts and duns, usurers and pawnshops and bailiffs. His wife was prodigiously fertile.

There were grand consoling moments—when Prague went mad over “Figaro” and “Don Giovanni”—uplifting to his spirit but useless to his pocket. There were no royalty laws in those days. But “Don Giovanni” did one thing for him: it made the Emperor think that perhaps there was something in Mozart after all. And so, as Gluck, who had been getting £200 a year, had just died, Mozart was given his job for £80 a year! And that was all that ever came of Leopold Mozart’s coloured dreams of patronage.

Eighty pounds a year could not cut the knots that were strangling the life out of Mozart. He gave lessons at five shillings a time. His wife was away for long stretches taking costly “cures.” He shifted to cheaper and cheaper lodgings. His friends began to fall away, all save the good merchant Pushberg, who lent him money that could never be repaid, and the innkeeper Deiner, who relieved his physical necessities.

The idea of death seized him as he worked on the mysteriously-commissioned “Requiem.” He did not finish it. He died crushed beneath a weight of debt and misery. Three mourners came to the church for the funeral service. The winter weather was so bad that they would not go to the graveside. They put up their umbrellas and ran away. A sexton took the cheap coffin and threw it into a pauper’s grave. It was reckoned that the cost of the funeral was about a pound.

Chopin

George Saintsbury has said of George Sand that "she succeeded in making at least two men of greater genius than herself, Alfred de Musset and Chopin, utterly miserable."

So enormous was George Sand's influence upon Chopin's life that Mr. Basil Maine would have made his book *Chopin* even more attractive than it already is if he had told his readers rather more than he has done of this remarkable woman's career before she and the musician met. She was but six years older than Chopin, yet what worlds of mundane experience she had conquered when their orbits crossed!

Her armorial bearings might well have contained a whole lattice of bars sinister. On her father's side she came down dubious tributaries of royal blood; her mother, the daughter of a Paris bird fancier, was lucky enough to get the marriage celebrated a month before Amandine Lucille Aurore dawned on the world.

Brought up in the country by her father's mother, a lady of the old régime, she shot and rode like a boy, and acquired with indiscriminate gusto a wide, unbalanced erudition.

Married at eighteen to a gentleman farmer too closely allied for her taste with his own turnips, she left him nine years later, when she was the mother of two children, and, with a fixed resolve to take love where she found it, went to Paris and was soon the mistress of Jules Sandeau.

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It didn't last long; and when, Sandeau being departed, she exclaimed brokenly: "My heart is a cemetery," he contented himself with the retort: "No, a necropolis."

Her success as a novelist was instantaneous. She would sit down at 10 p.m. and write till five in the morning, words dripping from her pen like water from a tap. She was a superb expositor of shallow thoughts and surface impressions. She wrote a hundred books.

She tried *Merimée* for a week, and then took Alfred de Musset to Italy. Her furious literary energy outraged his elegant conception of the just approach to the Muses. He fell ill; she seized the doctor whom she called in to attend him and bore him off to Paris, leaving Alfred on his bed of sickness.

Then she repented, cut off her hair and sent it to Alfred, but it left him unmoved. He remained in Italy.

These were but a few of the scalps she had captured when her eye fell on Chopin. The young consumptive Pole—he was twenty-seven—was lately arrived in Paris. His reputation was high; he was received everywhere. Somewhere he met George Sand. "Is she really a woman? I could almost doubt it," he said.

What was she like that she should raise these doubts in young Chopin's mind? Mr. Maine gives us Balzac's impression.

"I found comrade George Sand in her dressing-gown, smoking an after-dinner cigar in front of a fire in an immense empty room. She had lovely yellow slippers ornamented with fringe, bewitching stockings, and red trousers. So much for her state of mind. As to physique, she had doubled her chin like a prebendary. She has not a single

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white hair in spite of her frightful misfortunes; her swarthy complexion has not changed; her fine eyes are as brilliant as ever."

And what of Chopin, on whom she so quickly cast her eye at once of a voluptuary and a mother? Pale, melancholy, elegant, with long, silky hair. "His manners bore such an aristocratic stamp that one instinctively treated him like a prince."

In his rooms he surrounded himself with lovely things: carpets fastidiously chosen, silver, ornaments, flowers.

But the germs of physical decay were in him. He was suffering the melancholy pangs of unrequited love. Like Keats, whose verse is his music's echo—Keats, Chopin, Corot, the names sing together—like Keats he might have said, and, indeed, his music said it for him: "I have been half in love with easeful death."

It was an unequal contest. Whatever blue blood there was in George Sand's veins, it had been freely diluted by the blood of the bird-fancier's daughter. Avid as a hawk, shameless as a fishwife, she quickly disentangled herself from her latest amour with a gentleman named Mallefille, pounced upon Chopin, and, accompanied by her son and daughter, took him to Majorca.

In three cells of the old Charterhouse of Valemosa they made their quarters. The rooms, according to Chopin, were like coffins. "You could scream," he says in a grand phrase, "and there would still be silence."

The rains came and beat upon Majorca. The peasants, fearing the bright-eyed consumptive, avoided the mad people in the cells. Servants could not be had for love or money; the goat's milk ordered for Chopin was stolen; but at last his piano arrived.

So worn and ill did he become that at times he would gaze at his devouring mistress and not know she was there. "Out of his nervous exhaustion at this time," says Mr. Maine, "were born some of his loveliest fantasies."

At last they left. On a boat that had a hundred pigs aboard, Chopin, tortured with paroxysms of hæmorrhage, arrived at Barcelona. A French sloop of war took them on to Marseilles, and the ship's doctor stopped the hæmorrhage. Thus Chopin was saved to be for another ten years or so George Sand's companion.

They would spend the winter in Paris, the summer at her country house at Nohant. Meanwhile, her children were growing up, and, being reared on the free principles of their mother's beloved Rousseau, they, all unconsciously, forged the weapon that at last cut Chopin and George Sand asunder.

The daughter, Solange, married the sculptor Clésinger, and those two butted into some delicate relations that had arisen between the son Maurice, his friend, and a young woman. Mr. Maine relates the crisis briefly :

When Solange and her husband returned to Nohant there was a violent scene between the Clésingers on the one side and George Sand and her son on the other; Clésinger raised a hammer to strike Maurice; George, throwing herself between them, received a blow on the chest; and Maurice, armed with a pistol, was about to kill Clésinger but was prevented by a servant and some friends.

When Chopin, who was in Paris, heard of the affair, he took the side of Solange, and that finished him with Solange's mother. He dragged out two unhappy years before he died at the age of thirty-nine.

I know of no record that George Sand attended his funeral; but she used the story of their love, as she used all that happened in her life, to make yet another book. She lived to be seventy-two.

But if no memory from those ten stormy years attended his passing, there was a memory that came from farther still. Polish soil that he had brought in a silver cup when he left his home was thrown upon the coffin. His heart was taken back to Poland, where it had always belonged.

Beethoven

One day in 1787, when Mozart had troubles enough of his own, he was called on in Vienna by a youth he had never seen before. The boy did not look likely to smooth care's wrinkles from any brow. He was seventeen, an ugly-looking brute, with all the world's sorrow brooding untimely on his pock-marked, scowling face.

He had come from Bonn, and he wanted Mozart to hear him play the piano. Mozart sighed. There were so many. . . . Well, play away.

So Beethoven improvised on a theme by Mozart. Amazing music filled the room. Mozart's languor vanished. Perhaps he realised, with the sure premonition of death already in his heart, that fate had chosen that moment to show him the man to whom he would hand on the torch. "Keep an eye on him," he said to his friends. "He will make a noise."

Something of the noise he made you can learn from Mr. Alan Pryce-Jones's book *Beethoven*. It is not the music, but the man, that rises with the most urgent challenge out of these pages.

There is a legend which excuses Beethoven everything. It sees him as the prey of a bullying father; then as the young man who, his father and mother dead, shouldered the family burden and was, for reward, hindered and hurt by his brothers at every turn. It sees his nephew Karl, whom he adopted, as an ungrateful young bounder who did not deserve a great man's love. And in this legend Beethoven's

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love affairs are the spotless adventures of a knight in quest of the grail.

The legend has been shot at before. It has been left for Mr. Pryce-Jones to assemble the shots into a broadside and to present to us a Beethoven who was "stupid and clumsy . . . loutish, dirty, ungrateful, full of deceit, of lies, of treachery, of whining complaints; ugly, snobbish, hypocritical . . . a vast, blamable man." It is a sort of swine possessed by glorious devils that the pages portray.

Ludwig Beethoven was born in 1770 at Bonn, where his father was a court musician. His mother was the daughter of a cook and the widow of a valet. It was the grandfather, another Ludwig, also a musician, who "by his marriage to Maria Poll brought the dissolute streak which so often liberates profound creative ability."

The young Ludwig, ugly and prickly as a hedgehog from the beginning, was a slow learner. His development contrasts strangely with Mozart's. To Mozart, from his baby days, music was a flowery paradisaical field in which he loved to wander; to Beethoven it was a deep Plutonic mine, and the profundities of his infrequent experience in it draped him darkly even when he was in the common day, whose contacts, set against those great creative journeys which alone were real to him, seemed to have small meaning and to call for no consideration.

Hence the cleavage between Beethoven the man and Beethoven the musician. That, I suppose, is what Mr. Pryce-Jones means when he says that those dreadful qualities enumerated above can be "relegated to a province" of Beethoven; and that, in view of the immensity of the whole man, that province, "which comprises the whole life of ordinary people," does not, with him, matter very much. "We can watch him without either awe or repulsion."

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Watch him, then, as Mr. Pryce-Jones sees him, this man who at seventeen was "not unlike the figures rudely hacked out of a piece of wood by the Black Forest peasants," this man who "never learned to use words, let alone to spell them," who to his dying day could not do a simple multiplication sum, who suffered from a baffling "dumb unhappiness" which nothing would ever dispel, yet radiated a sense of dark power which attached men to him though he was as coarsely and boorishly insulting as Dr. Johnson.

"What you are," he wrote once to the kindly Prince Lichnowsky, "you are through accident and birth. What I am I am through my own efforts. There are princes, and there will be thousands of princes more. But there is only one Beethoven."

In his early twenties he went to Vienna and was well received, "though he could never keep his hair under his wig, and although he had a strong provincial accent, deplorable manners, coarse clothes, and an ugly face."

He was once arrested as a tramp, and neither his face nor his manners improved. "Too ugly and half mad," said a girl he wanted to marry. He lived at first mainly as a pianist. Six years after he came to Vienna he noticed that his hearing was affected. Desperately for a time he strove to hide the fatal defect, and in that struggle his natural bad manners turned to a "sour and terrible humour."

His physical filthiness grew worse and worse. A pupil called at his apartments. "The servant was grubby, the room strewn with clothes and papers, and Beethoven, who was dressed in a jacket and trousers of dark goat's hair, had not shaved for some days. His shock of hair was cut *à la Titus*, and screws of cotton wool, dipped in a yellow liquid, stuck out of his ears."

There were heart-breaking scenes when, hearing

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nothing, he would insist on conducting and reduce a concert to ruin. Once, not knowing that the house had risen tumultuously behind him, he had to be turned round to *see* the applause.

Between 1810 and 1815 he slid swiftly into "a desperate, an almost insane, decay." Greed and suspicion turned dumb sourness into active venom. He was "a Puritan in the most squalid sense of the word," but "not without sexual experience"; and he now developed a "vindictive abhorrence of the sexual acts of others."

The physical ruin of Beethoven went on apace. He would lather his face and forget to shave; he tottered about with a collection of ear trumpets and "conversation books" in which those wrote who wished to communicate with him. He lived in a "squalid atmosphere of dirty cotton wool, medicine bottles, purges and eye-lotions."

By the autumn of 1827 the end was near. Pneumonia struck his drink-weakened frame in December. For some months he was miraculously held together—a suffering bag of diseases, kept going on frozen punch. In March there was a great storm; hail and thunder rattled and roared. A blaze of lightning brought the dying man upright in bed. He lifted his hand as though to greet the stark and elemental flash. He remained upright, dead.

What can you say of him? Can you say more than was said by his only peer: "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown"?

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## *Liszt*

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Just about a hundred years ago a magnificent procession flowed through the streets of Berlin. First came a coach drawn by six white horses. "Thirty other carriages followed, drawn by four horses apiece, while an escort of students in their uniforms followed for some miles on the way."

Some king or conqueror? No; it was Mr. Liszt, who played the piano, proceeding in his customary fashion. He was in the first coach, accompanied, appropriately, by a prince who was honoured to be his aide-de-camp. If you had been there, you would have had no difficulty in deciding which was the prince and which the pianist. Liszt believed in so arranging things that he could not be overlooked. It pays to advertise. It was paying him to the tune of £12,000 a year.

None of your meek Mozarts or boorish Beethovens for brother Franz. No, sir! The polish of a courtier, the self-assurance of a herald, the opportunism of a born showman: these were the tools with which this man who was his own Barnum exploited the grandest turn that had ever till then been put on the road.

So, if you had looked into the coach, you would have recognised him—recognised the great, proud head with its copious mane, the luxurious clothes, the mesmeric, half-intended and half-unconscious emanation of a charlatan who was also a genius.

How grandly, Franz Liszt might have reflected,

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sitting there at the head of the clattering cavalcade, how grandly it had all "come off"! Women picking up his cigar-ends; women furtively pouring into little phials the dregs of his coffee, wearing his portrait on cameo brooches—and what a profile: eagle's beak and lion's mane!

Why, he had brought to heel even the Tsar of all the Russias! The lofty barbarian had dared to go on chattering while Liszt was playing. So Liszt stopped playing. Why had Liszt stopped playing? "Sire, music itself must be silent when Nicholas speaks."

What a grand, courteous ticking-off for the imperial boor! Poor old Beethoven would just have gone purple and costive with passion, and little Mozart—well, he would probably have stammered and wept. It took Franz, the Hungarian peasant boy with the manners of a prince, to assert the dignity of music, his own dignity, the dignity of all fine things threatened by enthroned Philistia.

So, as we watch him processing through the pages of Mr. Sacheverell Sitwell's book *Liszt*, we may imagine him reflecting that he may have been a circus, but he was on circuit: the friend of Chopin and Paganini, the heir of Byron, the herald of Wagner's frenzied and fabulous genius, he was an ambassador from the courts of culture with a piano for portfolio. He was the Romantic Movement made manifest and palpably on the march. He demanded and received the honours due to what he stood for.

So he moved about the world in the great travelling coach that was bedroom and drawing-room in one, from Copenhagen to Constantinople, from St. Petersburg to Madrid. London, Paris, Vienna, Budapest—all knew the explosions of his pyrotechnic personality, the extent of his wardrobe, the length of his hair, the genius of his musicianship. He talked on equal terms with princes, and, like a prince, he scattered

largesse from his own peculiar treasure. His lessons were always free, but were given only to the elect.

As he rode out of Berlin that day, he was poised midway in experience. He had come a long way since, the son of a land-steward, he had played about the estates of Hungarian Esterhazy. His genius flowered early. When he was a mere child a committee of enthusiasts guaranteed his education; so old Liszt threw in his hand and took the boy to Paris. He died when Franz was 16. Thereafter, self-sufficient, beautiful, courtly, a blotting-pad for various culture, a magnet for women, the boy moved with the assurance of a monarch in the kingdom that was his for the taking.

From the first, the world was at his feet, and soon, as the world will, it had thrown out an octopus-coil or two and restricted his freedom. He wanted his freedom back, and, riding out of Berlin, he may well have reflected how fortunate he was to have done with the Countess d'Agoult. Older than he was, with children of her own, to say nothing of the three children she had borne him, she had become intolerable; but now, he knew, he was not likely to see much more of her.

But at the end of that very journey a new enslavement awaited him. The Princess Carolyne of Sayn-Wittgenstein, a married woman younger than he, inheritor of great estates and 30,000 serfs, came into his life and stayed there. Ended now were his rollicking days on the road. With his own children and the Princess's daughter they settled at Weimar, where, abandoning wealth and the world, Liszt was content to give great laws unto a little clan. The princess waged an endless battle for divorce, but they were doomed never to be wed.

Years passed. Weimar, for one reason and another, became no longer possible, and the Princess left to

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plead her cause personally in Rome. On the eve of his fiftieth birthday Liszt joined her there. All was ready for the wedding. He had called at her house and was preparing to leave just before midnight, superstition forbidding that he should see her on her wedding day till they met at the altar, when a priest arrived with a letter from the Vatican. The wedding could not take place after all.

So Liszt himself decided to become a priest. Wedding or no wedding, they had had their life together. Thereafter they were good friends. She consoled herself with cigars, a private printing press, and the writing of a monumental work of literature; and Liszt, priest or no priest, was none the less Liszt. No soutane could smother the daemonic flame or forbid the approach of such choice adventure as came with the Cossack princess, her poisons and her pistols.

The Cossack princess, one suspects, was not the only one; but the priestly pianist declined slowly beyond passion's touch. His white and venerable mane looked well with his cassock. No doubt he knew it, a Barnum to the last. Weimar saw him again, and Budapest. He divided his year between those places and Rome.

In his 75th year, now a legend, a piece of walking history, a fabulous being who had known the long-dead Chopin and looked on the sparse flesh of Paganini, he made a final tour and then went home to die—appropriately at Bayreuth. Those who leant to catch his last utterance heard but one word—"Tristan."





## *Paint and Line*



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## Vincent Van Gogh

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When Vincent van Gogh was in his late twenties an uncle commissioned him to make some drawings. It was a gesture of charity to a down-and-out, and there were those who did not fail to remind Vincent that his uncle didn't think much of the drawings.

About ten years later, just before Van Gogh shot himself, he sold a picture for 400 francs, and he is said to have been shocked that a friend of his should spend so much money.

These were the only pictures he sold during his lifetime. "One picture of Vincent's to-day," says Mr. Peter Burra, in *Van Gogh*, "is 'worth' more than twice as much as he spent in the whole of his life."

It happens to be easy to calculate how much he spent. He had a brother, Theo, younger than himself, a steady-going, hard-working art dealer, as several of his uncles had been. Theo was Vincent's anchor. Whatever Vincent did—and most of his deeds were strange and some were dreadful—Theo never ceased to believe in the artist and love the man. He loved him so intensely that when Vincent died near Paris something snapped in Theo and he lived on for only a few months. Twenty-two years later his body was taken from its grave at Utrecht and laid alongside Vincent's.

Throughout Vincent's life as an artist Theo sent him 150 francs a month. He had literally no other resources, and so we know what he spent. At least,

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we know what he had to spend, but Vincent was the sort of man who would give away not only his money but the coat off his back and the very food off his plate.

A quest for the Christlike life of perfect renunciation obsessed the early years of his manhood. He was a Dutch pastor's son, and there was no economic reason why he should go the way he did. The reason was in him. Several of his uncles were men of comfortable position. One of them, a partner in the great art firm of Goupil, would have made Vincent his heir. But the boy hungered after righteousness, and a spell with Goupil's branch in London was followed by an outburst of evangelistic zeal, which led him to do some preaching at Isleworth.

Recognising his bent, though disliking it, his relatives persuaded him to study for a degree in Brussels; but that did not last long. Vincent did not see how Latin and Greek would help him to preach the Word of God to Belgian miners. He hurried off to his ministrations among them; gave first aid to those damaged in disasters; gave up his lodging-house that he might live in a hovel, gave away his clothes and his bed; went among the people with a dust-grimed face, dressed in sacking. The mission people did not like these ways. They dismissed him, and he turned to art.

His breach with the Church and an unsuccessful love affair—not the first or the last—deepened his revulsion from all that was successful and sophisticated. Soon we find him at The Hague, identifying himself with the world's outcasts by taking a prostitute into his house. "Her mother was a prostitute," says Mr. Burra, "her brother was living with a prostitute, she was bringing up her little girl of eleven to be a prostitute. . . . She was foul-mouthed, coarse and illiterate, marked with smallpox and

infected with venereal disease, she smoked cigars and was a spiteful and ungrateful intriguer."

For two years he endured life with that woman, worried by tax-collectors, dunned by creditors, scoffed at by all who thought they knew what pictures were. By all save the faithful Theo, sending the monthly dole. At last he left her, lived for a while among the peasants, and then returned to his father's house. The old man went in a carrier's cart to meet the prodigal. "He was confronted by a tramp, covered with mud and in tatters. Before they could return to Neuen, he had to buy his son a new pair of boots.

"As soon as the carrier had deposited them at the Pastorie he spread the news round the village that the Dominie had brought back with him the strangest creature alive. It never occurred to him that it was the Dominie's own son. In fact, his parents felt such a secret shame of Vincent that they never breathed a word to anyone of his existence."

He stayed at home for two years, and when he departed, never to return, he left behind him nearly all the pictures he had painted. "When his mother packed up to leave in March, the pictures were put into a box and left behind. Together with other unwanted rubbish, they were later put in the care of a carpenter at Breda, who, after waiting many years in a vain hope that the family would take them away, sold them for a few crowns to a junk dealer."

Then came the visit to Theo in Paris, where the Impressionists were in gay emergence; and then the journey to the South—to Arles, where in the sunshine his genius achieved its passionate efflorescence. Here at last was what he wanted. "The row of bushes in the background," he wrote, "are all oleanders, raving mad. The blasted things are flowering so violently that they may well get locomotor ataxia."

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Poor Vincent flowered violently, too, and went off his head. But not before he had given us the sunflowers and the bridge of Arles and all the other things which he saw with the clear candour of a delighted child. You cannot look at that bridge, held up by its delicate threads, at the horse trotting so gaily over it, and the little house on the right with its stripes of red and white like bars of sugar-candy, without thinking that just so, on a day of high holiday, it was seen by a boy looking up swiftly from his important business among the sticklebacks in the canal.

His bed, his chair, everything his eyes fell on in that southern light threw him into a rapture, and when he had got it down he did not sign it "Van Gogh": he signed it "Vincent," as a child signs its infant smudgings.

The end was near—that dreadful day when he cut off his ear and almost bled to death; the day when he went into the asylum and from between the bars painted the bright world without; the day when he climbed the hill and put the pistol to his breast.

They had to borrow a hearse, because the curé would not allow the parish one to be used for the funeral of a suicide. Someone carried a great bunch of sunflowers to the grave. That was Gachet, the doctor. He understood Vincent. He would have liked Vincent's habit of wearing a crown of candles for night-painting, seeing in it, perhaps, a symbol of this man who through so many dark years had nothing to guide him save the light that was on his own brow.

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## *Phil May*

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In the 'nineties it was still no unusual thing for a man to ride his horse to town. There was one man who often did it, and you must try to picture him as he leapt from the saddle one evening outside the National Sporting Club.

Though he was a shade above the average height, he was of slight build. His riding costume was a trifle aggressive, but you didn't think much about that when you saw the face. The dressing of the hair was unusual. It came down straight all round, like the hair of a Japanese doll, the fringe almost touching the thick eyebrows. The eyes beneath those brows looked out with a peculiar directness. They were grey and penetrating. The mouth was puzzling: firm and dogged and yet having the mobility that is moved swiftly to laughter.

The hands that are now throwing the reins to a loafer are long, beautiful, delicate. You will not see them, but you will see the face, on a plaque attached to No. 66, Wallace-street, New Wortley, Leeds, one of those little "back-to-back" houses in which the Industrial Revolution herded the artisans of the north. Under the face you read: "Phil May: 'A fellow of infinite jest.'"

Leaving Punch, the horse he was so fond of, in charge of the loafer, Phil May entered the National Sporting Club. Hours later—goodness knows how many hours later—he came out, got into a hansom, and was driven home. It was morning as he slipped



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into bed; and only then did he remember Punch. And he probably felt sorry for Punch in a vague, roseate fashion.

He was apt to be sorry on such occasions. Mr. James Thorpe, who has just written his biography—*Phil May, master-draughtsman and humorist*—tells us that, in particular, some compunction concerning his wife would stir in him in the early morning hours.

“On one occasion, in a condition far removed from abstinence, with his hansom at last turned in the direction of home, he found himself in the middle of the flowers at Covent Garden. ‘Roses!’ he exclaimed, ‘red roses! Lil loves them!’ And forthwith he had the cab filled with roses till it would hold no more. Arrived home, he found, as he usually did, that Mrs. May had gone to bed and was fast asleep. So, without waking her, he piled the bed high with the roses and himself slept on a sofa, leaving her to wake and find herself bowered and covered with her favourite flower.”

On another occasion her awakening was less idyllic, for all that May had been able to find for Lil was a five-foot conger eel, which reposed on her bed wrapped in the sketches which he should have delivered the day before at a newspaper office!

What could you do with such a man? Little enough. But Mrs. May, the widow who had kept a confectioner's shop in Leeds, did what she could. When Phil really was at work she would dress herself as a charwoman and blandly announce to a succession of sponging callers that Mr. and Mrs. May were out. At Phil's tumultuous studio parties, where he had a barrel of whisky on tap, flanked by tumblers and soda siphons, she would look out for the cadgers and thieves who shamelessly purloined the drawings of their generous host.

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At last the situation became so bad that she would write "To Lil" on the back of any drawing she could lay her hands on.

But plenty of drawings were stolen all the same. "There was a pawnshop in the Strand where many of these despicable characters turned their plunder into cash and where May's original drawings were often obtainable at much less than their real value."

It was a deplorable situation. One by one May's decent friends dropped off from the gatherings, till no one but the spongers remained.

Yes, there was little indeed to be done with that generous, foolish fellow.

The trouble was, thinks Mr. Thorpe, that May never forgot his childhood's privations, and when the chance came he tried to take hold of life with both hands. Privation enough there had been. This supreme master of black and white never had a lesson in his life; and yet Mr. Thorpe himself, so notable a practitioner of the same edgy art, writes that May's line "in its sureness resembled a crisp late-cut with a cricket bat, in its boldness a trapeze artist's leap from one swinging rope to another, in its deftness the fascination of Cinquevalli, in its delicate certainty of touch Lindrum's use of a cue at billiards."

Always he was drawing—from earliest childhood; and, turned out to work before he was thirteen, it was always to his drawing that he looked to make the fame whose conquest he seems never to have doubted.

A sovereign was the capital with which he began the siege of London, and fifteen-and-six went on the fare. He hawked his drawings about; he slept on the Embankment and under carts in Covent Garden; he begged for food. A physique that was never robust stored up all this, and in due time added it to May's folly to bring him down in his prime.

Success came quickly, and in 1895 he inscribed his initials on the famous table of *Punch* between those of Thackeray and Du Maurier. Strange companionship! Old Bombastic and Old Sentimentality were queer mates for that man of leaping humour. Dickens and Chaucer would have been better. May was always promising himself to illustrate the works of Dickens. He was full of these promises, but life was so good and there were so many people to stand drinks to that they were never fulfilled. As it is, one marvels at the vast amount of work he managed to do somehow.

Much of it was dragged out of him. Messengers would be sent with orders to stay on the doorstep till the drawing was done. On one occasion a sandwich-man paraded before his house with a board exhorting him "Don't forget the Christmas Number!"

He kept good-tempered through it all, smiling behind a vast inevitable cigar, as inseparable from him as from Lord Lonsdale.

Once he drew a picture that so thrilled W. G. Grace with horror that he sent a protest to May: "Why, oh, why does square-leg wear wicket-keeping gloves?" May received that at dinner, and not till it was over did he wire his reply. Grace was dragged from bed at an early hour to read: "To keep his hands warm."

This is a welcome book, and not least welcome for the many reproductions of Phil May's flashing line. Mr. Thorpe has loved May too sincerely to fore-shorten his failings or exaggerate his strength. We see the "nineties"—the more raffish side of the "nineties"—and moving through that boisterous decade we see May as he was—generous, frail Phil May, lavishing his time and money on the just and the unjust, a fellow of infinite jest, who "drew as a bird sings, because he could not help it."

He drew as a child; he was still drawing on his

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deathbed. He made sketches of himself as a skeleton, Death hovering near, dancing skeletons, flower-decked, beckoning.

Alas, poor Yorick ! He was thirty-nine when he died of phthisis and cirrhosis of the liver.



*Statesmen*



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## *Metternich*

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Mr. Algernon Cecil has put on record in *Metternich* a career which was a bridge between an age infinitely remote and these modern times, the end of whose travail we do not yet see. Metternich was Chancellor to the last man to bear Charlemagne's proud title of Holy Roman Emperor; and he lived long enough to talk with Francis Joseph, who ruled when the last hunt was up and was spared by kindly death the sight of Austria torn limb from limb and thrown to the dogs of nationalism.

In so far as Metternich's task was to preserve the Austrian Empire intact and to make it a powerful and respected member of the European concert, it may well be argued that inexorable circumstance has been too much and has brought his work to naught. In so far as he was a good European, enunciating by word and deed principles which are never out-dated, we may see him as one whose contribution was permanent. It is in that light that Metternich finally emerges from Mr. Cecil's book, which is as much a philosophic defence of Conservatism as a study of a man.

"Either a new world must be brought to birth or the old world must be regenerated." Those were the alternatives which confronted Metternich. In France, amid the blood and fury of the Terror, the old world was writhing in its death agonies; nor were there wanting elsewhere signs that many were



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but waiting the chance to topple tradition from its throne. Nevertheless, strong as the urge always is to wipe the slate clean, Metternich was convinced that things should be mended rather than ended. That was his task throughout 40 years in control of foreign policy in Austria.

You may see him as a misguided cooper, hoping with new hoops to preserve a rotten cask; or you may see him as a good gardener, striving to keep in the ground the ramified roots of a tree whose leaves were for the healing of the nations; but at least you will see him, when you have finished this book, as a man with a clear-cut philosophy which, rightly or wrongly, he applied with courage that did not flinch and energy that did not flag.

He served two Emperors, and, as it seems to me, they were at once his staunchest allies and his deadliest foes. In so far as both the one and the other allowed him a marvellously free hand, he was able to move with ease and assurance about his business; but in so far as neither was stirred with the remotest apprehension that something must be done in face of mutterings in Europe and Russia and Turkey, they betrayed their chancellor's work, which was, in a word, to bolster up that of which they were the symbols. Metternich had poor stuff to blazon on his banner.

"Crude conservatism framed in innocent egotism" is Mr. Cecil's summary of Francis I. "So long as I live," he declared, "things will remain as they are." Metternich once presented to him a memorandum proposing "the creation of some faint image of a parliament." For nine years it lay on the imperial writing table. One day Francis remembered it and assured Metternich that something would be done. Another nine years went by. Then it again came to

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his mind, but death relieved him of the fatigue of a decision.

But he was a decent fellow, capable of the sort of gesture that his subjects liked. Seeing once a pauper's funeral passing through the streets with none to mourn save the official burying party, he exclaimed: "Poor fellow! It's a sad procession for him," and followed the coffin to the grave.

His successor, Ferdinand, came to the throne at the age of 42. An epileptic with the mental stature of a child, he was no buttress to the cause of monarchy. His character is well illustrated by a story which Mr. Cecil does not tell. Overtaken by rain when walking in the country, he took refuge in a farm house. The smell of dumplings that were cooking pleased him and he asked if he might have one. His physician, who accompanied him, thought the dumpling would not be good for him, whereupon Ferdinand drew himself up with dignity and exclaimed: "I am the Emperor, I *will* have the dumpling!"

Ferdinand asserted his authority with equal firmness on another occasion. The malaise of Europe seized Vienna rudely when Metternich was 75. The mob was before the Council Chamber; within, the old Chancellor's enemies were drawing close. The people demanded his resignation. Would he give it? The mob-leaders would be back soon for his answer. The voice of the imperial half-wit spoke. "I am the Sovereign. Tell the people that I agree to everything." Deserted by the throne that he had served for nearly half a century, Metternich fled through the night and came to England.

One may imagine that ringing in his ears, an ironic comment on all he had stood for, was Ferdinand's foolish prating. "Tell the people that I

agree to everything!" The mob, that all through his life had been the hydra-headed thing that Metternich sought to cut down! The source of those violent pushes for which he would substitute subtle moulding. Europe, the tree, was one thing, with linked roots of infinite delicacy, and whatever unconstitutionally threatened it was to Metternich the enemy.

Whether the elemental gale of Napoleon's power-lust or the subterranean gnawing of an obscure anarch—equally, to Metternich, these were vile, and to be resisted to the end. And now, there he was, rumbling through the night in his coach, and the head of the empire that he had nursed and cherished was "agreeing to everything" that mob-law considered good.

So passed off the stage one to whom Mr. Cecil can give no higher title than a "good European." He had written: "There exists between governments, of whatever sort these are, a solidarity of interests which cannot be ignored as a rule except to their cost." But good Europeanism begins at home; and if in Metternich's philosophy government was the deep foundation, the monarch at least was the visible shining apex, and the sun of Austria shone upon base metal that had no enheartening spark to throw back to the beholder.

They are great and memorable days, mighty men and pregnant events, that are here recorded. Through it all passes Metternich, subtle and inscrutable, the very devil to some, to others the strongest pillar of political evolution and the staunchest champion of Latin civilisation. Here you have him admirably portrayed: the devoted father of a family who had Napoleon's sister for his mistress; the thrice-married man who died a widower; the everlasting Hamlet

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convinced that he was born out of due season. "I ought to have been born in 1900, and to have had the twentieth century before me."

It is interesting to speculate how the Congress of Versailles would have appeared to the man who rubbed shoulders with Talleyrand and Castlereagh at the Congress of Vienna.

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## Talleyrand

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It was Carlyle who said that the career of Talleyrand would be "an enigma for future ages."

An enigma indeed! A bishop whose profligacy was a byword throughout two continents; an invalid who lived to a great old age; a scholar of fastidious culture who married an addle-pated woman little better than of the streets; a statesman who deserted with unparalleled equanimity a succession of rulers who had taken him into their confidence; a member of the world's proudest aristocracy who took the kicks of boors with a shrug and an epigram; a shameless taker of enormous bribes and a stickler, even on his death-bed, for the minute observance of etiquette: these are some of the convolutions in the character of this strange snake of a fellow—convolutions which most of us would despair of straightening out. We would be content still to leave the task to "future ages."

But Mr. Duff Cooper, in *Talleyrand* has essayed the prodigious task. Though tributes to good qualities in Talleyrand can be found in plenty, Mr. Cooper is aware that history has put the man in the dock. Taking up the task of counsel for the defence, Mr. Cooper has produced a creditable piece of special pleading; and, in asking for an acquittal, he relies chiefly on this argument: that all the twists and turns in Talleyrand's character and career are not those of a snake but those of a river which, however much it may seem to change its course and double

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back and swerve and divagate, is all the time tending to a fore-ordained objective. And that objective, in the case of Talleyrand, was the good of France and the peace of Europe.

But can we acquit Talleyrand? It is difficult, to begin with, to enter without a sense of hallucination into the atmosphere in which he moved : that atmosphere in which, after the Revolution had broken up the nobility of France, cohorts of lovers and mistresses moved hither and thither about Europe and America, a sort of chain of free-love circuses, scintillating or poverty-stricken; talking, writing and intriguing with incomparable verve and brilliance, and finally drifting back upon Paris when the Terror had blown itself out and the star of Napoleon was in the ascendant.

Talleyrand, who stood by the Revolution but not by the Terror, was the most notable member of that volatile crew. You must picture him as a man with a limp, with a turned-up nose and small green eyes, a dandy, a gourmet whose chef achieved a European reputation. This is how the Countess Kielmannsegge saw him : "When he approached me with his limping gait, his heavy body, his flashing eyes, his snake-like mouth and jaw, his paralysing smile and his affected flatteries, I thought : 'Nature gave you the choice between snake and tiger, and you chose to be an anaconda.'"

Strange stories were abroad concerning him. In 1790, when the Feast of Federation took place in Paris, he was chosen, as Bishop of Autun, to celebrate mass at a great open-air service, the King and Queen and all the officers of the State being present. During the service Talleyrand whispered to Lafayette : "Don't make me laugh," and when it was all over he went to a gambling saloon and broke the bank. Not long afterwards the Pope excommunicated him.

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He never wanted to be a priest. His family pushed him into the church.

Talleyrand returned from exile to the world of the Directory—"a world ruined by charlatans and dominated by demireps." He became Minister for Foreign Affairs and received from the Governments of other countries vast sums of money that laid the foundation of a splendid fortune.

It was about this time that Talleyrand met Catherine-Noel Worlée, anybody's woman: "tall, with the supple figure of a Creole, blue eyes, a slightly retroussé nose, and a wealth of very fair hair." She became his mistress, and later, when Napoleon was trying to get on the right side of the Pope, and must therefore have a respectable Court, his wife. But that did not prevent him from having many other mistresses; the one who shared his last days was the daughter of one he had enjoyed in his heyday. His illegitimate children were numerous.

There is abundant testimony that women could not resist Talleyrand; and one does not drag them in here irrelevantly but because of his dictum that "women are politics."

Talleyrand was the chief agent in the overthrow of the Directory and the coming of Napoleon and the Consulate. What part he played in the murder of the Duke of Enghien, which preceded Napoleon's assumption of the Imperial purple, no one has been able to discover, and Mr. Duff Cooper records that he "did not protest against the crime, carried out his instructions in connection with it, and subsequently defended it."

As he had overthrown the Directory, so at last he assisted to overthrow Napoleon, with whose whole policy of Imperial expansion he profoundly disagreed. Mr. Duff Cooper does not make a convincing job of explaining why Talleyrand did not resign his offices.

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He clung on to the last, and was one of the first in with the returning Bourbons. Perhaps he remembered the day when Napoleon, in a room full of courtiers, had villified him for half an hour, concluding with the chaste remark that "he was nothing but so much dung in a silk stocking." Talleyrand permitted himself merely to comment: "What a pity that such a great man should be so ill-bred!" But perhaps he recalled the incident when he awaited the coming of Louis at Compiègne.

Louis managed to keep the throne till death took him off the scene. He was succeeded by Charles X, and Talleyrand was well in with the group which hailed Louis-Philippe when Charles X was deposed. During a night fracas which preceded that event he went to the window and exclaimed: "Hark! We are winning!" "We—who are we?" he was asked; and he answered: "Hush! Not a word! I will tell you to-morrow."

On that half-jocular but profoundly symptomatic remark might be founded the case in opposition to Mr. Duff Cooper's. Through all the stir and tumult of that time Talleyrand seemed to live with his ear to the ground to catch the first rumour of to-morrow's victor. And then, smiling and serene, there he was on the spot.

He died surrounded by people not unnaturally anxious about his soul. Papers had been drawn up, and the Archbishop had sent four witnesses to see that all was in order. Even a child dressed for first communion was brought in to impress Talleyrand's mind. He signed at last; but one cannot read Mr. Duff Cooper's account of those last hours without feeling that it must have been the most stage-managed entry into the Kingdom of God ever known in history.

Abraham Lincoln

The two greatest short speeches in history were delivered over the bodies of men slain in war. One was uttered at Athens by Pericles in 431 B.C. The other was uttered in the autumn of 1863 at Gettysburg by Abraham Lincoln.

Pericles's speech must have taken about half an hour to deliver. Lincoln's took two minutes. A great congregation of Greeks listened to Pericles. It was a highly ceremonial occasion; the utterance of the orator was formal and prepared. Very different was the speech at Gettysburg.

Mr. D. W. Brogan in *Abraham Lincoln* recalls the occasion. A military cemetery was to be dedicated, and Edward Everett, one of the star orators of the day, the best Greek scholar in America, doubtless acquainted with the original text of Pericles's oration, was to address the people.

Lincoln at the last moment decided to be there. He set off by train from Washington. On the way he wrote what he had to say. Everett spoke for two hours; the crowd wearied and scattered. The President rose; the wanderers began to come back, but by the time there was an audience the speech was over.

"No one," says Mr. Brogan, "certainly not the eloquent Everett, realised that the most famous of American orations had just been delivered." It contained 268 words. We may imagine that the lonely and enigmatic President himself had no idea that his

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scratching in the train had added a small jewel to the literature of the English-speaking people.

Not that he was a self-doubting man. He would never have got through if he had been that. He could hardly have had a harder start. His father, a shiftless farmer-carpenter, what Mr. Brogan calls a "poor white," gave him nothing but the doubtful blessing of life. His mother, an illegitimate child, died in his youth. He was at school for less than twelve months.

Mr. Brogan will not have the Lincoln of legend. He dismisses stories of the boy's "precocious interest in learning," admitting only that "reading fascinated him." But he was lazy, amiable and eccentric, and he grew up into a lanky lout whom men liked for his good nature and his physical strength.

When he left the backwoods his first contact with the great world was at New Salem, which had fifteen houses. There he was jack-of-all-trades—store-keeper, postmaster, surveyor—and he began to study law.

He was a good enough man to be elected to the Legislature of Illinois, which sat in the capital city, Vandalia, a place with a hundred houses. He was one of those responsible for shifting the centre of the State to Springfield, which thereafter became his home. It had 1500 inhabitants.

From such small beginnings, such microcosmic communities, the great President sprang. It was in Springfield he met his wife. He seems to have suspected what he was letting himself in for. He failed to turn up on the day first arranged for the wedding, but Mary Todd got him at last. It was nearly two years later. A friend saw him walking to church and asked where he was going. "To hell, I reckon," Lincoln said.

He was glad when circuit work as a lawyer kept him away from home. He was such a queer-looking

creature that on one occasion two famous lawyers with whom he was to act thought he would do their case no good. They kept him out of it, refused to let him address the court. Seven years later President Lincoln made one of them his Secretary for War.

Up to the very moment when he became President, Lincoln was an obscure politician depending on a decent law-practice for his living. His nomination as Republican candidate for the Presidency was, says Mr. Brogan, "startling to the country and frightening to the more far-seeing members of the party."

It was hoped that he would be a figurehead, letting better men run the country. There were a few people, and only a few people, deeply associated with Lincoln's life, who knew that that would not happen. Lincoln himself knew that it would not happen.

Power came to him at a moment when the greatest issue the States had ever faced must be settled one way or the other. The issue was not slavery or the abolition of slavery; it was union or secession.

Lincoln was like a creature picked up by history's haphazard hand from nowhere in particular to deal with that one great issue. To that he applied himself with a dogged single-mindedness. He would preserve the Union, he said, if it meant freeing not a single slave; he would preserve the Union if it meant freeing every slave; but he would preserve the Union.

He did what he had set his hand to, and it was his intention, when all was over, that there should be no reprisals, "no bloody work." But the assassin's pistol got him before he could turn to that new task.

There was one "queer" thing amid the many practical qualities that made Lincoln the man for his moment. On the eve of great events during the war he would dream a dream. It was always the same dream; he could and did describe it in detail to his Cabinet. "I dreamed my usual dream last night,"

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he would say. "Something is going to happen." And it always did. The dream came to him the night before the assassin burst into his box at the theatre.

And so he never came to that business of preventing "bloody work." One thing, and one thing only, was asked of him by history. He did it with a completeness such as few men achieve.

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## *Parnell*

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Charles Stewart Parnell's family lived at Avonmore, a beautiful house in the Wicklow mountains. They were landlords. They were Protestants, too; and they were not very Irish.

The founder of the family came from Congleton, of which town, Miss Joan Haslip tells us in *Parnell*, he was Lord Mayor. But certainly that little Cheshire place never had such a functionary.

There are two fascinating things about Parnell's career. One is that this English Protestant landlord became the mouthpiece and the idol of the Irish Catholic peasants; the other is that Parnell's public activities and private love affairs became interfused in so tragic a coil that the very cheek of history must for ever blush that a great movement of the human spirit should be defeated and overthrown by an exploitation of a splendid though adulterous love.

Parnell's public career was brief. He was born in 1846; he became a Member of Parliament at the age of 29; sixteen years later he was dead, having made himself passionately loved by the Irish people, passionately hated by the English, and having written his name indelibly across the face of history.

Never did a nation give its love to a man who seemed less cut out for the job of public hero. Parnell had none of the warmth of the demagogue. His appearance was dry, precise and pedantic. His public speech had none of the Celtic fervour that raises an

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audience to transient and illusory heights whence they view the paradisaal mirages that to-morrow are once more arid rock and barren sand.

He spoke in cold, logical sentences, without warmth or gesture. Michael Davitt called him "an Englishman of the strongest type moulded for an Irish purpose."

Parnell was very clear about what that purpose was. He wanted no violence. He wanted to separate Ireland from England by constitutional means; and, once that had been done, says Miss Haslip, "his Parliament in Dublin would have been run on Conservative lines, and the gentlemen of Ireland would have remained masters of their land."

This most excellent and readable book tells once more the fascinating story of how Parnell had all but achieved this purpose, of how, it seemed, there was little to be done save lift the cup to his lips, when Willie O'Shea dashed it to the ground and so ensured the misery of a nation, the agony of the Easter rebellion, the perfidy of the Black and Tans, and all the horrors we have seen before history took up again the purposes which the Willie O'Sheas of this world may hinder but not finally frustrate.

Willie O'Shea was an officer of Hussars who longed to cut a Parliamentary figure, and it was as an Irish member, attached to Parnell's own party, that he first met the Leader.

When Parnell saw O'Shea he said: "He is the sort of man we don't want in the Party." When he saw Mrs. O'Shea he said nothing. His heart turned over. He loved her.

The worst horror of the situation to him was the necessity for secrecy. Mrs. O'Shea was living with an enormously wealthy aunt. She knew—and Willie knew—that all that old woman's money would come to her so long as she continued to have her aunt's

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approval. Were Mrs. O'Shea to divorce her husband, there was an end of present affluence and golden expectations.

It is clear from Miss Haslip's pages that both the O'Sheas were light-weights. Willie shut his eyes, hoping to use Parnell—and again and again he did use him—to further his political ambitions. Kitty, though her affection for Parnell was great, could never live up to his austere ideal.

Their association, to him, was marriage. In his letters he calls himself her husband, calls her his wife; but Kitty was receiving the attentions of Willie all the same.

"She was at heart," says Miss Haslip, "an ambitious, calculating materialist, whom not even the most passionate love affair could transform, who was utterly incapable of any heroic sacrifice."

So the unhappy affair went on, the great Leader dodging here and there as "Mr. Stewart," as "Clement Preston," his body at last undermined and his mentality unhinged by all this cancerous subterfuge superimposed upon the inhuman burdens he was carrying for his country's sake.

And then the old woman died, and every penny came to Kitty. The relatives contested the will, and that meant delay in paying Willie his price. He would not wait. With satanic cunning he struck at the very moment when Gladstone's mind was set upon giving Parnell what he wanted.

Willie's divorce case destroyed Parnell as a political leader; and there was no other leader; and so there was no Home Rule.

"Never make me less than the man you have known," Parnell once said to Kitty O'Shea; and history made her ironic comment on that in Lord Salisbury's joyful chuckle: "Kitty O'Shea deserves

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to have a monument raised to her in every town in England."

Parnell married her, and within a year his body was borne to its resting-place through the mourning Dublin streets.





*Men and Women of Action*



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## Lord Kitchener

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Lord Esher's book, *The Tragedy of Lord Kitchener*, deals with Kitchener from the outbreak of the war to the sinking of the *Hampshire* in the spring of 1916. It is founded upon the author's correspondence and upon a journal which recorded events as they happened and which has not been corrected "by the doubtful light of subsequent reflection." "If I remain of the same mind," Lord Esher says, "and can obtain the consent of my co-trustees of the British Museum, the volumes, together with the correspondence which illustrates and explains them, will be sealed up for sixty years—the period of reticence selected by the author of *Waverley*—after which they may prove of some interest."

The title is well chosen. It is the tragedy that Mr. Conrad wrote about in *The End of the Tether*. In that story we read of a sea captain who went on working after he was blind, trying to take a ship down a river dark with treachery. Lord Esher sees Kitchener, and poignantly lays him before us, in similar tragic case. He was in charge of the ship; the navigation was beyond him. The title, says Lord Esher, is meant "to emphasise that hour when in mid-career, or what appeared to his countrymen a mid-career of fame, he himself became suddenly aware that the golden bowl was broken. . . . To the poet's vision the tragedy of Hamlet lay in the hero's consciousness of his own irresolution and not in the holocaust of death amid which the play ends."

It is not a pleasant book; but if this is the truth it

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is as well that we should know it. Considerably more than the foot of the god is of clay. A member of Kitchener's Army once wrote to the present writer in high excitement. Kitchener was coming to review his "mob." A few days later came another letter, bitter in its disillusionment. "Unimpressive. . . . Fat scorbutic face. . . ."

This book will impress the mind of the reader as Kitchener's presence impressed some of the men he reviewed. Lord Esher sets the matter down starkly. "He was no longer the K. of K. of the Soudan and South Africa, and he only as yet was aware of the tragic fact. . . . The armour of his soul had crusted; he had noted, if others had not, the corroding traces of the passage of the years. . . . The governing forces of the situation overwhelmed him, but only his intimate friends guessed what was happening." He was "unreceptive to new ideas, disinclined to adopt new methods which he himself did not originate, slow to take advantage of the experience of lesser men." "His form of speech was Cromwellian in its obscurity and incoherence. He would seem to be thinking aloud, his mind tossing in a flood of difficulties." It was difficult to get him "to give unqualified assent to any proposition the truth of which was not so clear and distinct that it could not be doubted."

Afflicted with this rigid mental equipment, Kitchener was called upon to confront circumstances amazing in their fluidity. From the outset the most distressing thing to him was the compulsion to work in consultation with a civilian Cabinet. He had been unaccustomed to issue written orders even for such operations as those in the Soudan. Now he had to act with a Cabinet of twenty-three. The experiment worked badly; some learned to fear him, some to dislike him, some to distrust him. He became involved, unwittingly, in political intrigue, and while

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the great unsuspecting public was comforting itself with the thought that all was well because Kitchener was at the helm, the hand on the helm was unsteady and unnerved. It was found that he was ignorant of army organisation, was indifferent to War Office regulations, knew nothing of the Territorial Force, its organisation or origin. "Of the Territorial Associations he had not heard, and he smiled grimly at the notion that these 'Saturday afternoon warriors' were organised in brigades and divisions." "He was unaware of the high mental tension on the battle-front in France," and in those months of tension one might find the hall of York House, where he then lived, littered with tapestries and bric-à-brac which he either rejected or bought for his house at Broome. When our army was praying for shells, "he convinced himself, though he failed to convince his colleagues in the Government, that the clamour for shells and munitions was exaggerated and wantonly factious." His one great achievement was that he was strong in Sir John French's hours of weakness in 1914.

If the picture thus far be a true one—and one cannot doubt the author's high authority—it is difficult to understand Lord Esher's complacency at the thought that "the confidence of the people did not fluctuate, and the masses remained unshaken . . . so that when the King bestowed the Garter upon him the Sovereign reflected the feelings of the people." Kitchener surely could not have complained had his own method been applied to himself. His method was, we read, to put you "right away" if he decided you could do no good. True, he had raised vast armies, but one finds it hard to believe that the idealism of the youth of this country rallied to nothing more than the glamour of a name. In those places where the eye of the "masses" did not look, dissatisfaction grew. The great leader did not lead; and Kitchener could

not conceal from himself, when he went to Gallipoli in November, 1915, that many hoped he would not return. It was a tragic scene that took place in the British Embassy at Paris before he set out.

In the dingy room he occupied at the top of the British Embassy he stood with his back to the fire while the letters were read aloud to him by Fitzgerald. He was standing with bowed head as he listened, and when he raised it his eyes were full of tears. When he broke the silence, he spoke of the dislike felt for him by his colleagues, adding "Asquith is my only friend." One present told him that an eminent member of the Cabinet had complained that he was wanting in candour and too fond of what were supposed to be "Oriental methods". He said quite humbly: "Yes, I suppose it is so; but I am an old man, and I cannot change my habits—it is too late."

He went, and he came back; and, says Lord Esher, "since King John had word that the 'Devil was unchained' no wanderer had returned home so unwelcome." His powers fell from him one by one—first munitions, then recruiting, then operations. "They want to use my name and deprive me of authority," he complained. His days were few then till that fatal June night when he put out from the Scottish shore through wind and spray to the *Hampshire*. And even when the news came that his rugged obstinacy would trouble his colleagues no more, "a Frenchman of great influence and experience" could find it in his heart to say: "He had seen his best days and his work was finished. It is better so."

It is tragedy indeed that the steel and ice of the legendary Kitchener should be removed to show us only an old man crying friendlessly in a Parisian attic.

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“He was never seen to address or even to notice a private soldier.” He had about him in the War Office “tired men who trembled before him and his reputation.” “He was severe on men who failed him, and those who served him had to succeed, for he took no excuse.” The moralist will perhaps write “Nemesis” over his lonely end, over his old-age fever to acquire *things* for that house at Broome where he was fated not to dwell. Lord Esher, who does not approach his task as a moralist, writes: “That his was an abiding influence cannot be urged.”



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## *Captain Scott*

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Mr. Martin Lindsay, himself an arctic explorer, has written a book called *The Epic of Captain Scott*.

"Epic" is a word often lightly used. Here it is used with justice and precision. Most of the vaunted deeds strung on the long chain of human hardihood dwindle to small proportions when they are set against the tale of Scott and his few companions, with death staring them in the face, with the opium in their hands that would have brought them sweet release, yet choosing to go to the bitter end and fall in their tracks.

It is not the tale of one flaming moment of heroism. It is a tale that has a beginning, a continuation amid circumstances of increasing grandeur, and an end in death swallowed up in victory. In a word, it is epic, and Mr. Lindsay has presented it worthily.

It has been presented often enough before; but here it is done briefly, shorn of much detail, in a way that would make it effective to a boy's mind. I could wish nothing better for this book than that, this Christmas, it should find its way on to many boys' shelves. It will do them no harm to have a rest from fabulous fictions. Here is something that a band of great Englishmen did, and if boys do not thrill to it there is something wrong with their breed.

It is just over twenty years ago that Scott's ship, the *Terra Nova*, an old Dundee whaler of 744 tons, landed the South Pole exploration party at Cape Evans, 922 miles from the Pole.

There were three stages in the journey that had to be made. For 421 miles stretched the "Barrier," a great plain of ice. It was Scott's intention to send as much stuff as he could, as far as possible over the Barrier, on motor sledges. Dog sledges and Siberian ponies would follow. When the motor sledges had got as far as they could, the ponies, comparatively fresh, would take the loads forward to the end of the Barrier. There the ponies would be slaughtered for fresh meat.

Rising at the end of the Barrier is a great range of granite mountains, some of the peaks more than 9000 ft. high. Through the mountains runs the Beardmore Glacier, a vast frozen river, with frozen tributaries flowing down to it from the granite fastnesses. The second stage of the journey was over this glacier, a distance of 126 miles, terrible going; and here, the dogs having been sent back when the horses were slaughtered, the party of explorers, now reduced to twelve, would have to pull their own sledges—four men to a sledge. Each sledge carried a weight of 800 lb.

Beyond the glacier stretched the third and last part of the journey—the Plateau, a huge convexity of 359 miles, rising at first and then steadily falling away in a great arc to the Pole, to the end of the world, to the spot where you look north whichever way you turn.

At some point on the Plateau which Scott was to determine, and which happened to be 150 miles from the Pole, two of the sledges would return, leaving one sledge and four men to make the final dash. The object of bringing so many men so far was to lay depôts, marked with flags, so that the returning party might pick up food, oil and other necessities.

All these things were done, with one exception. When Scott chose his final party he kept five men

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instead of four. All those men died. They were Captain Scott, Dr. E. A. Wilson, Captain L. E. G. Oates, Petty Officer Edgar Evans and Lieutenant H. R. Bowers. Bowers was the man whom Scott at the last moment decided to add to the party.

In Mr. Lindsay's opinion the addition of the fifth man meant the death of them all. "Cooking for five," Scott noted in his diary, "takes a seriously longer time than cooking for four; perhaps half an hour on the whole day."

"Half an hour wasted a day," Mr. Lindsay writes. "Half an hour off the time allotted for sleep or half an hour off the day's march. Three and a half hours a week and two whole days by the middle of March. Just the difference between reaching One Ton depôt and failing to do so."

One Ton depôt was the spot which, on the return journey, Scott and two other survivors just failed to reach. It was thirteen miles away when the blizzard caught him; and Bowers had cost them two days!

All three stages of this great journey are vividly presented by Mr. Lindsay: the association of men, dogs and horses, the world's most ancient allies, in the hard slog over the Barrier; the agony of mind and sinew as the crossing of the Glacier was made, men slipping into crevasses again and again, and only the harness that attached them to the sledges preventing their falling to depths that were never fathomed; the growing excitement, when the Plateau was reached, to know whether Amundsen had got first to the Pole.

He had; they found the few vestiges that he had left as mark of his great achievement; and, wasting no time, turned their faces towards the home they were not to see. There was little to make them linger. "Great God," Scott wrote in his diary, "this is an awful place."

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They had been out for 76 days. Three of them were frost-bitten; all were hungry and weak. In their backs the wind blew up with blizzard force over the curve of the world's end. They rigged a sail to their sledge and blew back over the Plateau.

Seven days after they started Amundsen was already in his ship, but they were benighted wanderers, caught by the Antarctic winter. Death itself was driving them on. It drove them over the Plateau, over the Beardmore Glacier, one with fingernails dropping out, one with a sprained leg, all battered by the blizzards, strained to pieces by the loads they dragged, sleeping in wet bags in a tent whose walls were ice from their frozen breathing.

Evans lagged. Fatally but magnificently they waited for him to die. Oates was giving out, and sounded Wilson concerning suicide. "Slog on!" said Wilson, "slog on!" But Oates made the great decision, went out, and achieved a suicide as heroic as a redemption.

Scott, Bowers and Wilson slogged on, each with the opium pellets that would have ended his agony; but they decided, as Scott put it in his final letter, "to die naturally in the track."

I do not know anything more moving in the history of man's achievement than those last few hours when Scott, with the blizzard raging without, sat in the tent with his two dead friends, lonely as if he were the last man in a perishing world, and wrote the messages which a relenting fate preserved for an inspiration to anyone who has glimpsed the meaning of fortitude.

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## *Oliver Cromwell*

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Men who have lived in the atmosphere of great events put on a dignity that may not be overlooked, as a tree that has stood for long upon a hilltop seems even in sunny weather to be vested with knowledge of storms and stars.

It is understandable that Mr. John Buchan, in his grand book, *Oliver Cromwell* should say of the ageing Protector: "He belonged to the small circle of great kings, though he never sat on a throne." It is understandable that there should then have been about Oliver "a brooding power and a sense of slumbering flames."

The man who had dethroned a dynasty, who had beheaded a king, who had taken Parliaments by the scruff of the neck and rubbed their noses in the dirt; the man who had known the thrill of the cavalry charge at Marston Moor as the evening came down and at Dunbar when morning was stealing upon the land, and had seen the reek of carnage at Drogheda: such a man, indeed, might be expected to be shrouded with destiny and marked with the inescapable stamp of fate.

But what of the young Cromwell, the yeoman from the Fen country, who came up to St. Stephen's from his beeves and his brewing? What was there about this David who had tried as yet no conclusions with Goliath institutions, this Saul who went out to find the asses and became a king?

Mr. Buchan does not make it clear. No biographer

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of Oliver has made it clear; though there is evidence that his contemporaries felt immortal matter to be in the man. We must accept the fact, but we cannot explain it. It is to me the most fascinating mystery of Cromwell's career.

He had already passed his fortieth year—he was not an “eaglet”—when he attracted attention more by his slovenly habit than by aught else. Picture him there, a backwoods member addressing the House, so little known that a member asked John Hampden who he was. “That sloven whom you see before you,” Hampden answered, “hath no ornament in his speech; that sloven, I say, if we should ever come to a breach with the King (which God forbid), in such a case I say that sloven will be the greatest man in England.”

Why did Hampden feel that about him? There is no answer. He was a countryman of substantial ancestry, English with a distant dash of the Celt, a fellow of contrary impulses, now breaking out in rude horseplay, now given over to religious brooding and introspection. He was not like most of the religious partisans of his day, who loudly demanded the freedom to enslave. His own children were baptised into the Anglican Church, and Mr. Buchan reminds us that when he left that communion he never attached himself to another.

He married young, was the father of five children when, at 29, he made a brief contact with Parliament. Then back he went to his farm and laboured obscurely for a decade, an uncouth man who wore red flannel round his neck, loved his horses, and found delight in a day's hawking.

It is not fanciful to see in his love of horses one of the threads by which fate was to bind him to his country's history. Save to the few, he was completely unknown when the clash came with the King. But

because he loved horses he became a cavalry captain, being then 43 years of age; he became a cavalry colonel; he and his officers became, says Mr. Buchan, "the most shameless horse-thieves in England." He built up the cavalry arm of the Parliament; but, even after Marston Moor, it was written: "At this time he had never shown extraordinary parts, nor do I think he did himself believe that he had them."

And then, when the war was over, and his military genius had made the Army his to do as he liked with, he discovered that the Parliament for which he had fought was as frail and rotten a thing as the Crown against which it had directed his arm. And there he was: the undisputed master of the only effective instrument in the country.

From that point Cromwell's career is easier to understand; but till then it is full of unanswered questions. Why some of the foremost men in the land should have thought so highly of him; how a farmer, past his fortieth year, developed a genius for both strategy and tactics in the field—it's mystery all.

Mr. Buchan has come down as a stronger partisan of Oliver than I should have expected. He admits that the trial of Charles had "no shadow of legality." It was "like a drumhead court-martial"; but on the Royalist side "the one damning fact was the character of Charles." Cromwell was faced with one of history's cruel dilemmas. He wished to preserve the monarchy—on terms; but experience had taught him that the King was not likely to honour the terms. Charles was what the vulgar would call a twister; or, as Mr. Buchan more gently puts it, "His public conduct had been in the highest degree fantastic, disingenuous and uncertain."

The King beheaded, Parliament at last disbanded with contempt, there confronted Oliver the unprecedented task of building up the conduct of the realm

from a ground razed clean. If, as Mr. Buchan says, it was "impossible for him to leave any permanent construction behind him," if the Restoration joy bells were soon to ring and Congreve's bawds shout down the Miltonic angels, at least it would be impossible thereafter to forget that in the slow English slept fires that could be raised at need to consume pretences, even the most lofty. Cromwell would probably have considered that to establish that fact was not a bad bit of construction.

Lady Hester Stanhope

The Viscountess Mahon, daughter of the first Earl of Chatham, sister of William Pitt, died at the age of twenty-five, leaving three daughters to roam about the great house of Chevening, in Kent, in the care of an eccentric father.

The eldest of the girls, Hester Stanhope, was four years old. With a father such as hers, it was no wonder that she grew up to be a queer woman. The Viscount, who was soon to become the third Earl Stanhope, was unbalanced, inventive and republican. Miss Joan Haslip tells us in *Lady Hester Stanhope* that he offered the Government plans for driving a boat by steam. On the fall of the Bastille, he styled himself "Citizen Stanhope," erased the armorial bearings from the family plate, and apprenticed Hester's half-brother to the local smithy.

The democratic fire in him was not damped till one of his daughters surreptitiously married the neighbouring apothecary. Citizen Stanhope was of the same mind as the man who said that, while all negroes were his brothers, he couldn't see one of them as his brother-in-law. The Earl could not see Citizen Taylor as a son-in-law, but there it was, whether he liked it or not. I don't suppose his guests liked it when, being assembled for a party on the upper floor of a wooden house, they found flames rising on every hand. It was another of the Earl's experiments. They had to lump it, and so had he when Lucy married Mr. Taylor.

Hester had some of her father's eccentricities. It was eccentric in those days for a well-bred woman to have the fashion of direct speech which soon made the girl dreaded by some and admired by others. Pitt's niece, launched on the society in which the Regent ruffled it with Brummell, and Devonshire House knew its hey-day, had to be treated with respect. But she herself was profoundly disrespectful. In a day of polite and simpering talk she was capable of calling a general a "paralytic old kangaroo."

She was courted by men, backbitten by women, but so long as Pitt was Prime Minister and Hester Stanhope looked after the social side of 10, Downing-street, she was on top of the world. A "six foot Amazon with blue, flashing eyes," a domineering, outspoken, imperious young woman, she was yet lacking in the arts of dissimulation, and a shattered love affair left her exposed to the malice of her enemies.

As Pitt lay dying, he said: "If the nation should think fit to reward my services, let them take charge of my niece"; and a pension of £1200 a year was granted to Hester Stanhope. Disappointed in love, with power, which was the only thing she valued, shattered in her hands, with middle-age staring her in the face, she determined to leave England. She never returned.

A youth named Meryon, who had just become a doctor, accompanied her, and little did poor Meryon think what he was letting himself in for. There was a Mrs. Fry, too, and later a Miss Williams. Like a vampire, Hester sucked the blood out of all of them. Miss Williams died in her service. Meryon, worn to a thread by her hallucinations and caprice, left her after thirty years, just before her own end. All the thanks he got was a letter which she wrote to England damning him as a good-for-nothing, "without judgment, without heart."

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You cannot read what Miss Haslip has to say about this man's sacrifice, working for his mistress amid plagues and pestilences, amid wars and poverty, cleaning her filthy house, reading to her, writing for her, doctor, cook, bottle-washer and slave, she all the time the grand lady treating him like dirt, paying him little or nothing : you cannot read of that long devotion, to which the man's own wife was at times a victim, without feeling that the woman who wrote as she did about him was fundamentally not the imposing character that Lady Hester Stanhope is so often represented to be.

To me, she comes out of this book a megalomaniac with a lust for personal power. There is no single action recorded here which cannot be so explained. It is a well-known story : how she settled at last in a monastery which she made her home in the Syrian mountains ; how she talked on terms of equal haughtiness and insolence with the princes and brigands—hardly distinguishable—who surrounded her ; how she espoused the cause of the Turk against all comers and kept open house for refugees, defying Turkey's enemies to cross her threshold. They never did. She lived magnificently inviolate and self-sufficient.

And all this was a bolster to her colossal egotism. She gave lavishly—borrowing from others—when the giving would redound to her glory ; she was exacting and cruel to those who could give her vanity no prop. Dr. Meryon and Miss Williams were treated with harsh contempt ; her servants were thrashed with whips ; but any old sponger who could discover an occult manuscript foretelling her greatness was welcome to all she had.

So overweening was her vanity that she imagined the British Treasury should finance her maddest schemes. So far from doing that, the Treasury at last stopped her pension in order to pay her creditors.

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The ramshackle glory that she had raised about her declined to filth and squalor. Racked with consumption, she ended her days in a fever of hallucinations of glory. She was to be Queen of the East and a Messiah would ride on her right hand. But she just died—the grand-daughter of Chatham, the niece of Pitt—leaving nothing but a name for insolence carried to the pitch of insanity.

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### *General George Monck*

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On a November day in 1659 a heavily built and phlegmatic soldier was scouting along the Tweed, looking for the best place at which an army might cross from Scotland to England.

His name was George Monck, a soldier of fortune. Devon born and bred, a younger son of an impoverished father, he had seen in youth no hope of advancement save such as he might win for himself.

Ten years of service in the Low Countries had made him an accomplished soldier. He had a sword to sell, and when he had sold it he gave the utmost devotion to the purchaser.

His biographer, Mr. Oliver Warner, in his most readable book, *Hero of the Restoration*, emphasises this side of Monck's character. "He served for money, and money came."

When the Civil War broke out Monck joined the Royalist forces. Captured by the Parliament men, he was imprisoned in the Tower for two years. Then, with the King a prisoner in the power of Parliament, Monck was offered and accepted service under Cromwell.

The service took him to Ireland, and after that he was one of Cromwell's officers at the "crowning mercy" of Dunbar. Cromwell had given Monck a regiment of his own, and that regiment was among the troops camped round about him on the November day in 1659 when he was looking for a ford over the Tweed.

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At the village of Coldstream he found what he was seeking, and that is why Monck's regiment, which exists to this day, is called the Coldstream Guards.

Why, you may ask, when the regiment had seen so much and such varied service should it take its name from that Scottish village? Because its crossing into England that far-off November was a decisive event in English history.

Much had happened since Cromwell and Monck fought side by side at Dunbar. Cromwell ruled England; Monck, in Scotland, was the Protector's representative, governing from Dalkeith.

He governed well. Clarendon, who didn't love Monck, acknowledged, concerning his work in Scotland, that "he was not unloved by the common people, who received more justice and less oppression from him than they had been accustomed to under their own lords."

This augustan peace in the North, this spectacle of a great soldier given over to the cultivation of his palace garden, may well have deceived the turbulent spirits who broke loose in England when Cromwell died. The Army ruled the roost. Parliament became a derision and a laughing-stock. But those who laughed forgot the old soldier at Dalkeith, commander of 7000 men, disciplined and devoted.

Monck made no bones about selling his sword, but he never believed that an army should govern a country. The army must be the servant, not the master; and he now declared: "I am engaged in conscience and honour to see my country freed from that intolerable slavery of a sword government, and I know England cannot, nay, will not, endure it."

His allegiance had been given to the Parliament, and, if we are to believe Macaulay, he and his men viewed the situation in London "with indignation resembling the indignation which the Roman legions

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posted on the Danube and Euphrates felt when they learned that the Empire had been put up to sale by the Praetorian Guards."

But as Monck and his men crossed the Tweed that winter day there was more involved than a demonstration of loyalty to Parliament. The Parliament that then existed was a wretched body, unpopular and unrepresentative. Another Parliament would have to be elected, and Monck must have known that, sickened by the feuds and dissensions of the time, the people would choose a Parliament pledged to royalty.

In a word, Monck was aware as he and his men crossed the river at the Coldstream ford, that he was about to put the Stuarts back on the throne of England.

Guizot, in his long *History of Civilisation in Europe*, mentions Monck's name only once. "Monck undertook the conduct of the event which all England looked for," and there really is not much more to be said about it. England was sick of mismanagement by plebeian saints and was willing to chance a royal sinner.

In the process of the turnover, George Monck did two notable things. He gave the decisive tilt to the scales because he had power and discipline at command; and secondly, and perhaps more notably, this taciturn ugly man, whom Pepys found a bore, went about his business with such consummate statecraft or with such heaven-sent luck that the Restoration was effected without, as it was written, so much as a bloody nose.

Monck became Duke of Albemarle, and in his patents of nobility he was celebrated as "the bloodless victor." Few of the hairpin bends of history have been so satisfactorily turned.

The new Duchess of Albemarle, Nan Clarges, was a farrier's daughter. "Dirty dishes, a nasty wife, and bad meat," Mr. Pepys wrote of a visit to the Duke.

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They don't seem to have been very nice people in their private lives. Mr. Warner calls them excessively greedy; Nan was in the habit of gloating over her casket of jewels

But judgment of Monck must be judgment of his conduct as a soldier. In achieving the Restoration, as in everything else, he was, though a great one, a mercenary. Like the mercenaries whose epitaph Housman wrote, he "saved the sum of things for pay."



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### *Siamese White*

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*Siamese White*, by Maurice Collis, is the story of Samuel White, a captain of the mercantile marine, who, towards the end of the seventeenth century, went to India as a servant of the British East India Company and was loaned by them to the King of Siam.

It tells how White was placed in a position of great trust, how he was given control of the king's ships, how he used them for his own ends, sending out his captains upon piratical errands and accumulating a fortune. Then he came home but did not long enjoy his loot. He died six months after reaching England.

This all makes a magnificent story, full of interest and excitement, but there is more to it than that. Mr. Collis, who has lived for years on the scene of these high happenings—a scene which, he says, is unaltered in substantial particulars to this day—is able to give us a first-hand picture of a fascinating land: of a lovely archipelago, of rivers and rapids, of an immemorial track through jungles haunted by tigers and malaria, but said “also to contain gold, oil and tin deposits, rare animals such as tapirs, caches of Ming porcelain and pieces of eight.”

And there is yet another thing. In addition to the vivid story of Samuel White, played out against the background of this vivid land—“one of the last unexplored regions in Asia”—Mr. Collis throws much light on the early workings of the East India

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Company, the august body whose composure was deeply disturbed by Samuel's career.

The company was doing very nicely. "It was said that forty persons owned the majority of the shares," and over a long course of years the dividends averaged 22 per cent.

Mr. Collis tells of one voyage which resulted in the "remarkable return" of £190,000. This must have been gratifying to the gentlemen sitting in panelled board-rooms in London; but one wonders how it struck the men who did the work. They got little enough for their labours in conditions which were always arduous and often hazardous.

We read, for example, that when it was necessary to make an inquiry into the state of things in Siam, the company sent out a Mr. Strangh at £50 a year, assisted by Thomas Yale, whose brother Elihu later founded Yale University. Thomas Yale received £30 a year.

"A factor at Madras," says Mr. Collis, "only received £20 a year. Elihu Yale, second in council of Madras at that date, was paid £100 a year."

The company could "get away" with these contemptible salaries in the same way that enterprises of our own day can pay almost nothing because there is the expectation of tips. It was known that once you got to the East you could trade on your own account, and no doubt the servants emulated their masters in seeing that the trade was conducted on the basis of gain out of all proportion to outlay.

An impartial reader of this magnificently readable book is driven to the conclusion that Samuel White, looking at the situation as he saw it, reasoned that the company's method of buying at next door to nothing, paying its servants next door to nothing, and selling at an enormous profit, was piracy within the law. He decided to take the chance of becoming a pirate outside the law.

Mr. Collis puts the thing in a nutshell when he says that the premier interest of both the company and the interlopers was "a private fortune as quick as possible."

White wrote that he must "ene make hay while the sun shines," and, as luck would have it, the sun shone brilliantly for him. His brother, a sea captain who had preceded him to the East, had been helpful to a young Greek named Phaulkon, and Phaulkon, making his way to the Court of Siam, had a career as strange as anything in a Christmas pantomime.

Phaulkon is a far more remarkable person than Samuel White, and one almost wishes that it was his story, not White's, that Mr. Collis had undertaken to tell. He was far more than an adventurer in quest of fortune: he was an adventurer of the spirit who "had the unbridled imagination of genius."

He became "Lord Phaulkon," chief man of the realm, before whom mandarins and foreign courtiers crawled. He fell at last and died a horrible death, but he lasted long enough to be of great service to Samuel White. He it was who procured for White the rank of mandarin, gave him control of revenues which White turned into his own pocket, gave him command of the king's ships, whose captains White sent out on filibustering affairs to his private profit.

It is a swift, incredible story. In the almost impregnable harbour of his little Siamese town White felt himself safe from the menace of the old gentlemen in the London board-room, so many thousands of miles away.

But so incensed were they at interference with the rich booty which they had an exclusive charter to collect that they at last moved against White, hiring a frigate from the Crown, and confronting him one fine day just as he was about to bolt on one of his ships.

But even an officer of the King's Navy was not

proof against the double blandishment of the charm which White could exercise and the loot which he could promise.

The rogue got away with it, and had the impudence, on returning to London, to make a claim against the company. His was an amazing career. He was the type of man who might easily have become a national hero.

William Penn

It is the lot of most of us to go through life taking many things for granted.

There simply is not the time to verify all that we are told, and persistent scepticism is an uncomfortable creed. In particular, we are apt to take our great men readymade; and one name to which, almost unconsciously, we attach the attributes of greatness is that of William Penn.

But when I had finished reading Mr. Bonamy Dobrée's *William Penn*, I had to ask myself straight: "Well, is this a great man?" and I had to answer myself straight: "No, it isn't."

An example of the remarkable inaccuracies into which we may be led by our "great man" obsession occurs on the jacket of this book. "The conversion of William Penn to the Society of Friends meant, perhaps, as much for that religion as the conversion of Saul of Tarsus meant for Christianity."

To begin with, is "that religion" to be thus differentiated from Christianity? And if all that is meant is that Penn's influence on Christianity was, "perhaps," as great as Paul's, then we must admit that "perhaps" is a word for once profitably employed.

Penn was the son of an admiral who would have liked to see the boy take to a modish life, but the Quaker influence took hold of him early and he wrote a pamphlet weighing in heavily against "choristers, organs, altars . . . and such like dirty trash and foul superstition," and followed this up with a book which

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caused him to be thrown into the Tower. There he lost his hair, and took to a wig, which George Fox excused to scandalised Quakers on the ground that it was only "a little civil border, thin, plain and short . . . a very civil sort of thing." He explained that "it cost only five shillings," but later, when Penn became famous, his wig blossomed to "fifty-shilling size."

The attitude which some Quakers took to the wig was symptomatic. By many Penn was never wholly liked, particularly because throughout his life he had access to the highest Court circles. The attitude was much like that with which some branch secretaries of the Labour Party regard Mr. Thomas's dress shirt and Mr. MacDonald's silk hat.

The early story of Penn's life as a Quaker is the story of tremendous energy exerting itself with remarkable indifference upon objects worthy and unworthy. "There was," Mr. Dobrée rightly says, "no deep quietude in him." It is difficult to put your finger on anything and say, "Here was the man's fount and secret resource." He had, it is true, one profound obsession throughout life, and that was the importance to the State of religious liberty, and he pursued that ideal rather with the dogged obstinacy of political persuasion than with the flamelit enthusiasm of religious belief.

While justice requires that Penn be given all credit for thus demanding an open field, and suffering for the demand, this book at least gives no evidence that he had any individual contribution to make towards putting something into the field. His writing, as recorded here, breathes piousness rather than piety, and his addresses, allied to what Mr. Dobrée calls his "thick, honeyed voice" and Bishop Burnet called "a tedious, luscious way," have none of the passionate converting eloquence of the great religious leaders.

Penn would argue with anyone—from the maniacal Lodowick Muggleton, who believed that God was “an average-sized man” and that Heaven was six miles above the earth, to such princes and princesses as he could lay by the heels.

On one occasion he covered 3000 miles in less than three months, “and all the while had been busied with meetings, with visits, with writing private letters and public communications. Yet in this short time he brought out no less than four pamphlets.” Those four pamphlets were part of an enormous output. But who to-day reads a word of it?

Penn inherited a good income from his father, and his wife had some property. These resources enabled him to face his task in the New World. Charles II granted him the Governorship of the province to be called Pennsylvania in satisfaction of a debt of £16,000 owing to Penn’s father.

In what sense was Penn the “founder” of Pennsylvania? He wrote some admirable folders calling attention to the resources of the province. “Mighty whales,” he said, “roll upon the coast, and sturgeon play continually in our streams in summer,” which makes one think of that language of agricultural hyperbole which Mr. Micawber affected before leaving for Australia.

He spent two years laying the foundations of his State, and then came home. The fabric thereupon collapsed into bickering and faction. He was in England for fifteen years, and during that time was shamelessly used by James II as a tool in the furtherance of his endeavour to impose Papacy upon England. When he returned to Pennsylvania, which he bitterly lamented “has been a dear Pennsylvania to me,” he found it impossible to compose the discord; and after two brief years came home again, leaving behind him “incomprehension, suspicion and hostility.”

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Penn was a man of the highest aspiration, but greatness consists in nailing aspiration down to the counter. As a religious leader he lacked dynamic; as the governor of a province he lacked authority.

What of his influence on those nearest to him? Three children by his first marriage survived infancy. One died when a boy, uttering the banal religious platitudes of an Eric. He was, Mr. Dobrée comments, "certainly not the sort of son most of us would wish to have." Neither was William, who became a notorious libertine. The daughter, Laetitia, ceased to belong to the Society of Friends, and married a youth who squeezed Penn dry. So even there Penn did not make a success of life.

The children by his second marriage did not come for long under his care. Before they were grown up his mind gave way. For six years he lingered in harmless insanity, quite happy, smiling, chasing butterflies, picking buttercups, and murmuring now and then "Sensible and savoury."

Not a great man; but as near to greatness as this: that he was prepared to ruin himself financially and to beat out the lamp of his reason for things which he was big enough to apprehend, though too small to achieve.





## *Men of Thought*



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*Francis Bacon*

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Macaulay, acting the part he so much loved and so admirably fulfilled, of advocate, judge and jury all in one, pronounced upon Bacon one of his most devastating verdicts. Allowing for all that was exalted in the prisoner's thought and all that was noble in his disposition, he found, nevertheless, that he had

“Sullied his integrity, had resigned his independence, had violated the most sacred obligations of friendship and gratitude, had flattered the worthless, had persecuted the innocent, had tampered with judges, had tortured prisoners, had plundered suitors, had wasted on paltry intrigues all the powers of the most exquisitely constructed intellect that has ever been bestowed on any of the children of men.”

Removing his wig in order to wipe from his brow the sweat engendered by a peroration even for him remarkable, Macaulay turns aside, equally dazzled and dismayed, “from the checkered spectacle of so much glory and so much shame.”

This impassioned rhetoric of the Marshall Hall of historians moves not at all Mr. Charles Williams, who, in quieter accents if with conviction no less profound, states the case for the defence in *Bacon*. He does not bother, indeed, to refer to the opinions of his learned friend except to say that “Macaulay—so

unnecessarily—lamented over” Bacon “as over a fallen archangel.”

“So unnecessarily?” That is the question. In these days, when, to use a phrase that Bacon himself coined, “greatness is the mark and accusation is the game,” it is good to find someone who will stand prisoner’s friend and experience some hesitation in taking up the first stone. But, even allowing that the mountain of stones which Macaulay’s ballista found necessary for the reduction of so august a city contained many that should never have been hurled, do none remain which justice should take up with an indifferent hand?

Macaulay and Mr. Williams are both agreed on the greatness of the philosopher. It is the character of the man which the one sees as completely foul, the other as vitiated by no more than a pardonable minimum of human weakness and vacillation.

Bacon has never lacked advocates. It was of Macaulay’s black sheep that the contemporary Ben Jonson wrote:

Whose even thread the Fates spin round  
and full  
Out of their choicest and their whitest wool,

and within the last few months Miss Mary Sturt, in her excellent *Francis Bacon*, has given us a man of “pure and honest actions” who was “probably of all politicians, men of high place and power, the kindest, least spiteful and least subtle.”

It seems to me that the two words “least subtle” are at the root of the man revealed in Mr. Williams’s book, assuming that we use the word subtle in the naughty sense in which “the serpent was the most subtle of all the beasts of the field.” But so varied are the view that may be taken of this orbic man that

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it was precisely as a serpent that Lytton Strachey saw him. "A serpent might well," he writes in *Elizabeth and Essex*, "have been his chosen emblem—the wise, sinuous, dangerous creature, offspring of mystery and the beautiful earth."

But there was a fundamental simplicity about Francis Bacon: the simplicity which is inseparable from any great inescapable fact. It is part of his simplicity that there never was a man surer of himself. He was young—though he naïvely called himself "somewhat ancient"—when he announced "I have taken all knowledge for my province"; and when he was old his faith was still childlike enough for him to say in his will: "My name I leave to the next ages and to foreign nations." A fine hair divides such divine assurance from arrogance; but you cannot fail to see it when it exists.

Bacon was born into circumstances which promised him a prosperous political career. His father and his great relations the Cecils were well dug in to those departments whence place and privilege are dispensed. But his father's death and the niggard regard of the Cecils left him with his own way to make, and he made it but slowly.

His friendship with Essex, Elizabeth's favourite, brought little save the occasion for the blackest count in the indictment against Bacon's character. When Essex was on trial, his life in the balance, it was Bacon who conducted the prosecution of his friend, placed as it were Essex's head upon the block, though if Bacon's hand had not performed the office some other would.

This transaction permits to Macaulay his loudest roar and to Mr. Williams the reflection that Bacon "was almost the last man in England to believe in philosophic kingship." In the monarch he saw "a mortal god on earth"; and, that being so, the friend-

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ship with Essex must weigh no more than a mere expediency when it is overborne by necessity. Essex had plotted against the Crown; and that implied for Bacon "the necessity, even the moral duty, of accepting the displeasure of the Crown when and where that displeasure was shown."

It is kind of Mr. Williams to make this point so clearly: it allows us without nausea to swallow some of the crawling letters written by Bacon to Majesty and to those on whom the mortal gods on earth had imparted the reflection of their effulgence. It is one explanation; I could find another in the man's uns subtlety, in his willingness to do the thing that was done—provided it were an indifferent matter—without making any bones.

In James I Bacon's hesitant bud found the royal sun that should bring it to the full stretch of efflorescence. Honours, so long delayed, piled thick upon him; but his summer, coming so late, was a St. Martin's summer of brief and treacherous splendour. In a few years the winter gale was on him, and his earthly estate was stripped away, leaving him to consolidate his citizenship of a greater city.

The acceptance of bribes was the charge on which he was degraded from the office of Chancellor, and it was a charge he would not fight. Bribes were a custom of the time; and we would all like to think that Francis Bacon rose superior to a custom that was vicious and indefensible. He didn't. He had been Chancellor for four years; and it is Mr. Williams's view that "if four years' labour in any occupation leaves us with no worse record of sin there are few who would not be—except by high laws of sanctity—content."

Here, alas! Mr. Williams can find no philosophic belief which may excuse the course that Bacon fol-

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lowed. He throws his hero—as Bacon threw himself—upon the mercy of the court; and the verdict of posterity will probably be more lenient than that of his judges, who could hardly do other than insist on the theoretic importance of unsullied purity.



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## Erasmus

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There is a card game delightfully known as Strip Jack Naked. The name might serve as a blazoning on the banner of the modern biographer. Biographies abound as they never abounded before. From all ages and all countries the sheep come bleating up to the shearing shed; "snip" go the scissors, and, deprived of the comfortable covering which, till then, had hid his deformities from prying eyes, another victim bounds out into the sunlight, stripped, stark and ridiculous.

Now it is the turn of Erasmus. Mr. Christopher Hollis has run the clippers over him in *Erasmus*. Hitherto there has been a common notion that Erasmus was a scholar of repute, an incarnation of the New Learning, a doughty swashbuckler who could give as good as he got in intellectual debate. Mr. Hollis sums up Erasmus in one phrase: "Erasmus was a funny man who made some extremely good dirty jokes."

Mr. Hollis does not like Erasmus. He will not have the fellow at any price. He recalls the saying of Thomas More: "Erasmus has published volumes more full of wisdom than Europe has seen for ages. . . . Erasmus is the dearest friend that I have." Quite right, agrees Mr. Hollis. No doubt Erasmus did write much that was wise, and it would have been "unexceptionable if it had come from another pen. So far as it offends, it only offends because we feel that in Erasmus there is malice behind the satire. It is

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not that he was a heretic; it is merely that he was a very uncharitable man. The objection is not that he thought monks bad, but that he wished them bad."

Well, there it is. You can accept the view of Sir Thomas More, who knew the man and who knew the conditions he wrote about, or you can accept the view of Mr. Christopher Hollis, who thinks that "to commend the moral mission of Erasmus is as absurd as it would be to commend the works of Mr. P. G. Wodehouse for their theological orthodoxy."

It is not surprising that, having reduced Erasmus to the level of a purveyor of bawdy tales, Mr. Hollis should find also that "his word is not worth very much," that "he never told the truth when it happened to be to his interest to tell a lie," that he was "conceited, malicious, and often far from honourable in his dealings with others," that he was a "master of mendicancy." As to those guardians concerning whose management of his youth Erasmus made complaint, well, "being guardian to anyone is not much fun, but being a guardian to young Erasmus must have been hell on earth. Send him to a monastery? The wonder was that they did not drown him."

Who was this Erasmus? He was a poor Dutch boy, illegitimate, who became a monk and grew up when two important things were happening in the world. The New Learning had unsealed fountains of humanism which had been frozen over for centuries, and the abuses of the Catholic Church had stirred a resentment which found a voice in Luther and the Reformation.

To acquire all that he might of the New Learning, and to transmit it by means of the printing press, then getting into its stride, was one of the passions of Erasmus's life. It involved a life of wandering, because in those days you had to go where learning was, and it involved a life of begging for the means of

travel and the means of study. It involved odious dedications to wealthy patrons. All very humiliating, no doubt; but the man had the talent and the guts, the wish to cut free from the hidebound routine of his monastery, and he adopted the only means which the times permitted. He said unkind things about the people who fed him. Granted; but was any "dedication" ever written without the tongue in the cheek and gall on the palate?

As to the Reformation, it has been said that "Erasmus laid the egg and Luther hatched it." Mr. Hollis dislikes them both. "The likes of Luther," he contemptuously snorts, as though the fellow were a freak of nature instead of one of the resounding names of history. Erasmus, so sickened by formalism that he forgot the undoubted value of forms, was attracted by Luther, as Luther was by him. But they never came wholly together. They bobbed now into propinquity, now into opposition, on the troubled current of the times, and finally they drifted apart.

Mr. Hollis sums them up thus: "Luther was a religious man who believed in an untrue religion; Erasmus was an irreligious man. The positions both of Luther and of Erasmus were not so much anti-Catholic as anti-Christian." It was a mere accident of chronology, says Mr. Hollis, which connected Luther's life with that of Erasmus.

Not Luther but Rabelais was the true child of Erasmus! "Three hundred years before Rousseau and four hundred years before Pater, he advised man to express himself by the satisfaction of his impulses, not only in so far as they were reasonable, but merely because they were his impulses." From this it is an easy leap to hand to Erasmus the intellectual paternity of Rabelais, who wrote over the gateway of Thélème, "Go as you please."

Erasmus lived to be an old man. It is generally

supposed that no priest was present when he died, and that he did not receive the Last Sacraments. For what it is worth, Mr. Hollis establishes that a priest was living with him as secretary at the end, but the question of the Sacraments is unresolved. If he was anti-Christian it seems a vain point. He left nothing for clerical purposes, most of his money to the poor. Perhaps thus, though but at the last, he partly extricates himself from Mr. Hollis's gibe: "Any pretence that he ever made that he tried to regulate his own conduct by that of Christ was the most patent insincerity."

Finally, even if you dissent as profoundly as I do from Mr. Hollis's conclusions, I think you will enjoy his brilliant, hostile book.

Courtesans

Nell Gwynn

When Nell Gwynn was only eighteen years of age she was already the toast of the town. Imagine a young actress of our own day who has only to appear in a bright and cheerful show to bring all the West End flocking to the theatre. Imagine, too, that plain folk, because of her lowly origin and her unashamed acknowledgment of it, love her with that rich instinctive affection that goes out to an unspoiled successful child of the people. Imagine, further, a meteoric rise from gutter to grandeur, and you begin to have some idea of Nell Gwynn at eighteen.

Small wonder that when, in the pages of Mr. Clifford Bax's book, *Pretty, Witty Nell*, we see her setting out for the theatre with young Villiers, there was a light in his eye and a spring in his step. Nell was not playing that day. She was taking a busman's holiday. She belonged to the King's House—a theatre which stood where Drury Lane Theatre stands now; but that day she went to the opposition show—the Duke's Theatre.

It was destined to be an unhappy day for Villiers. In the next box were two young men, one of them darkly attractive. He thrust his attention upon Nell with unmistakable plainness; he even suggested, when the show was over, that they should all go off and feed somewhere together. Soon they found themselves in an eating-house near by, and all through dinner, while the dark, attractive man kept Nell brightly


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occupied, his brother engaged the miserable Villiers in such conversation as he would listen to.

Then the tavern-keeper came with the bill. "Odds-fish! We have drunk too deep for my pocket!" said the dark young man, who happened to be the King of England; and his lugubrious brother—"Dismal Jimmy," as Nell Gwynn was soon to be calling him—found that he, too, was stony broke. So Villiers had the fun of paying for four dinners and seeing his girl stolen from under his nose by a man who never gave back a girl worth keeping.

And Nell Gwynn was supremely worth keeping. There was a salt savour of humanity about the woman that was to Charles's jaded senses as the touch of an olive is to a palate jaded with saccharine. Or perhaps Nell was more of a salted potato. She had funds to draw on; and, unlike most women translated from the kennels to the second-best bedroom, she drew on them without shame.

She had been born in a slum. Her mother was a drink-sodden wretch who might be met reeling about the gutters near Drury-lane. Her sister became a highwayman's wife. She herself, when a child, was employed in a brothel, serving drink to sluts and libertines. In her early teens she joined the gay crew who sold oranges in the King's Theatre; and at fifteen she had made her spirited way to the other side of the footlights. Mr. Pepys, seeing her there, dubbed her "Pretty, witty Nell."

What exactly did Pepys see? "Though below middle size," says Mr. Bax, "she was well-turned. By our own standard she would seem decidedly small. Her hair, luxuriant and curly, was bronze-red in colour, streaked with gold. Her eyebrows and eyelashes were dark; her eyes dark blue, and her nose a little tip-tilted. She had a fine skin and a wild rose

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complexion. She was famed for the smallness of her feet."

Comedy was her great line; she could dash an impromptu impertinence at an audience with an audacity that made them sit up like a douche of cold water; but you must not imagine her as merely a piece of bright inanity. At seventeen she was a leading lady, playing in the works of Ben Jonson and Beaumont and Fletcher. Dryden was writing plays with an eye especially on fitting Nell into the leading part; and he held up the production of *Almanzor and Almahide* so that she might comfortably get over the business of having a baby before coming back to work.

Such, then, was the woman whom Charles installed in a house in Pall Mall, with a garden running conveniently down to St. James's. And in setting her up there he had the first flick of that combination of wit and ribaldry that made her conduct so attractive a contrast to the decorous immorality of Louise de Quérouailles. It was a leasehold house that Charles proposed. She asked "if it was fair to give her merely a leasehold when she had given him a freehold?"

This sort of coarse but frank buffoonery characterised all her doings. She caused her warming-pan to be engraved with the words: "Fear God, serve the King," and she not only called a spade a spade but went further. Once she found her coachman fighting another man, and in explanation he said the man had cast reflections on her virtue. "Blockhead," she reproved him. "If you want to risk your carcase, do so in defence of the truth."

Nell, no doubt, enjoyed her splendour: her coach, her bedstead made entirely of silver, and all the other items of her price; but she never allowed these things to destroy either her humanity or her sense of humour. She continued to acknowledge openly, and

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to help, her drunken old dam and her riskily-married sister—she who now was able to intercede for such magnificent persons as Buckingham; and in her disbursements you will find not only white satin petticoats but “alms to poor men and women.”

She loved to take a rise out of Charles's more starchy concubines. When Barbara Villiers drove abroad in a coach and eight Nell responded with a coach and eight oxen; and when Louise would go into mourning on some royal death Nell would counter with plumes and crêpe for some imaginary chief or cham.

I, for one, do not take too seriously Mr. Bax's view, derived from a study of Nell's horoscope, that her guiding instinct was maternal and that she could not resist “mothering” Charles and her other men, but it is not necessary to agree with all that Mr. Bax has written to enjoy his lively, entertaining book.

The virtue of this unvirtuous woman lay in her abhorrence of a fake. What she was she was, and she made no bones about it. Mrs. Aphra Behn used to tell Nell the words “as if you were made on purpose to put the whole world in a good humour,” and one can well believe that she meant it.

That Nell Gwynn had great affection for Charles cannot be doubted. There is a noble simplicity in the words which she wrote about him to “Dismal Jimmy” when James became King. “He was my friend, and allowed me to tell him all my griefs.”

She was thirty-seven when she died. Charles had been stricken down before carrying out his intention to make her Countess of Greenwich.

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### *The Magnificent Montez*

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Lola Montez, according to an obituary notice written when she died in 1861, was "the most notorious Paphian in Europe."

The most notorious perhaps but not the most successful. There are some women as surely born to be mistresses as others are born to be wives. To be a King's mistress, as Lola Montez was, might seem the supreme achievement of an artist in that *genre*; but it is not. The supreme achievement is to be a successful mistress.

Lola was a failure in every affair she entered into. In the case of Ludwig I of Bavaria, her failure was disastrous. She never learned the first thing about the job of being a king's mistress, which is to reconcile opposition, to make her position tolerable, if not acceptable, to those who dislike it; above all, to keep the counterpane out of the council chamber.

She was accustomed, literally, to whack her way through opposition with a dog-whip. From one end to the other of Mr. Horace Wyndham's *The Magnificent Montez*, there is not the gentlest hint that she had any gifts of mind or spirit. Her magnificence was only physical.

Even Nell Gwynn—no stateswoman, heaven knows—had a tongue that could twist a missile of ribald wit and spit it at the crowd. Mr. Wyndham has not been able to put on record one word by the magnificent Montez that remains in the mind.

Moreover, unlike Nell and other famous courtesans,

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she was a liar about her origins. Always, she wanted to be taken for a lady. The name she went by was used in order to bolster up her cock-and-bull stories about descent from a noble Spanish family.

She seems to have had that dark Irish beauty which is not unlike the Spanish. That, and a habit of speaking in broken English, consolidated her myth.

She was born in barracks in Limerick. Her father, an ensign who had risen from the ranks, took her and her mother to India, where he died. The mother married again, and the girl, Eliza Gilbert, or, to give her her full sonorous title, Marie Dolores Eliza Rosanna Gilbert, was sent home.

She married a Lieutenant James, returned with him to India, was deserted by him, came back to England, found a lover on the way, was deserted by him, and decided to go upon the stage.

It may be remarked, in passing, that the men Lola Montez married and the men she lived with, not having married them, tired of her quickly. Even as a "Paphian," she must have lacked some essential quality.

She went to Spain to learn to dance and does not seem to have succeeded. The critics who wrote about her public performances were rapturous concerning her face and figure—"as for her bewitching calves, they suggest the steps of a Jacob's ladder transporting one up to heaven"—but they were reticent or caustic about her dancing.

However, she danced her way through Europe, picking up lovers here and there, including Liszt. As she truthfully said: "Dancing isn't everything."

She was 27 and Ludwig of Bavaria was 62 when they met at Munich. The worst was to be expected, for the old man was married to a "plain and exemplary" princess. He was held to be a very eccentric person because he grudged every penny spent on the army

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and gloried in money spent on the patronage of the arts.

He built for Lola Montez a charming little palace. He showered wealth and favours upon her; but he knew nothing of the finesse, decorum and discretion which should characterise the licence and indecorum of kings.

The woman was allowed to butt in everywhere. She knew as little as he how tenuous the threads of such an intrigue must be if they are to be strong. She was rampant and blatant, trying to have her say in politics to such an extent that, whether it were true or not, she was held to be the emissary of unfriendly powers.

She was hounded from the country, and Ludwig himself lost his throne. All this was achieved in about 18 months. Few kings' mistresses in history can have bungled a job so completely and so quickly.

Yet, lacking as she was in all acumen, Lola was so vain as to imagine that the character of Becky Sharp was founded upon hers.

Her career thereafter was a succession of episodes that became dingier and dingier. She achieved several marriages, toured the world as an actress, found at last that even the American public was tired of her, lived in a mining camp, gave public readings, dabbled in spiritualism, wrote books on beauty, and finally, as so many Magdalens do when they have not a high kick left, she turned religious and made a habit of looking up the fallen girls of New York and warning them of the perils of the career which she herself had certainly reduced to bungling incompetence.

Mr. Wyndham says of her that she was "gallant and generous and charitable," but I do not gather from his pages any instances of her charity or generosity.

I gather the impression of a woman out for herself

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from beginning to end, one who was prepared to tell any lie without a blush, one who underestimated the powers necessary for the career she adopted, and so achieved nothing but ignominy both for herself and the most august of her lovers.

## *Fiction*





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## *Nobody Starves*

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Concerning *Nobody Starves*, by Catherine Brody, Mr. Sinclair Lewis has written that it has social importance as well as literary importance. I suppose it has. But the literary importance does not come to much; the social importance is overwhelming.

The book is harrowing. Let those leave it unread who love the lush pastures of a fool's paradise. In the midst of so much talk about "turning the corner," "brighter times ahead," and "burying old man Depression" it comes with disturbing force, as though someone should "drop a brick" in the midst of a conversation that is very polite and dreadfully meaningless.

The title is a fine piece of irony. "Nobody starves." It is true. There is not a person in the book who goes for long without food. On the other hand, there is hardly one who is not perpetually under the shadow. The sickening sense, that sucks the very guts out of manhood, of impending tragedy that never quite becomes embodied—this it is that makes the shadow under which all the lives in this book dwell.

"She had really better go to see a doctor—even if it did cost three dollars—and tell Bill—and then, even if it were so, well, if their hands grew numb they would hold on with their nails, if their nails grew numb then with their teeth, but hold on they would, they must—till—things grew better."

It was Molly Redding, wife of Bill Redding, who made that reflection. Molly's story can be quickly

told. When we meet her first she is working in a tile-factory, and she is "walking out" with Bill. Both are intellectually inadequate. The job done for the day, they have no resource save the "radio" and the cinema. They belong to the millions who will survive so long as society has a use for the small accomplishments, the trivial skill, which are all they have to offer.

Bill and Molly met at a time when society was finding itself forced to do without many of the things which people like Bill and Molly make. The great American slump had begun. In shops and factories workers are being "laid off." There is not much to worry about at first: nothing but hair-cracks in the fabulous structure of prosperity. Work is reduced by a shift a week or the pay is docked by no more than a dollar; and, anyway, if you don't like one job you can move with some ease to another.

Bill moved to Detroit to work in a motor-car factory. Molly joined him there, and they were married. Miss Brody's picture of Detroit is a minor creation of nightmare: a synthetic town of cafeterias and antiseptic "grocceterias," hard-gleaming white cement, roads which continued into the time of freedom the nauseating effect of those endless conveyor belts that were the unceasing taskmasters of working hours.

Bill and Molly could have put up with that. Give Molly a car—so many of the workers had them—and she could put up with most things. But as she said, "We're so careful we haven't even got a car." There is acute social comment in that word "even." She was glad she had been careful when Bill came home one day and announced, "I'm out on my ear." The slump had reached the motor factories.

Thereafter the book is nothing but the tale of a dwindling number of jobs and a swelling host of men

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and women lined up morning, noon and night to apply for them. Bill and Molly moved to the neighbouring town of Micmac, where all life was controlled by one motor-manufacturing company. Sometimes Bill had a job, sometimes Molly had one, sometimes both were employed. But all the time they knew that they worked with their heads on the block of the guillotine and that at any time the steel might fall.

One thing that Molly learned was "the immense disloyalty of money." "There was no assurance that it would cleave to the people who had earned it and guarded it. It could be enjoyed by anyone who happened to get it in his hands at the moment, and, once gone, could disappear as immutably as time."

The disintegration of Micmac is terribly presented. Everybody was trying to sell the car, trying to wangle a way out of this commitment and that. The shops kept up a show. "Buy now!" And Molly asked bitterly, "With what? Well, if this ever ends, I know one thing—I'll never save again—never—never! You scrimp and save and stint yourself and you get a little money together, and then you have to scrimp and save and stint yourself to make it last over a bad time. You never have a thing *any* time."

"If this ever ends." It ended for Molly, tragically enough. Bill went back to Detroit to look for a job, taking his place in the queue at midnight. "It was not so unusual for men to wait in line all night. . . . There were at least a score of men ahead of him. . . . Bill squatted down, chin to knees, in the position of the last comer. . . . Fifteen below zero to look for a job is hard." By morning there were two long surging lines, but no work. Only a riot, wallops from the police.

That was the end for Bill. He went back to Micmac and blew out his wife's brains as she slept. As he was taken off in the police car he was heartened by an

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amusing spectacle. Old Man Depression was being taken along the streets in a black coffin. Mourners followed. "Then came ranks of business men on holiday, red Oriental fezzes atop flashing spectacles—dried countenances—pudgy cheeks. Banners borne aloft: Down with Old Man Depression! Take him out and bury him in the graveyard! This is Business Confidence Week!"

It was a fine procession. The police made a break in the middle of it to allow Bill to get through to the white concrete splendour of the new gaol. "He was not sorry she was dead; only sorry she could not live."

As a writer Miss Brody is at her best when she describes something she has seen. She has seen standardised industry with its standardised towns, producing its pathetic standardised people, and here she has put it all on record with a brutal fidelity. Some of her phrases evoke a scene as though your own eyes were on it. "He opened an iron door. The immense room rushed to meet them like a tornado."

The whole phase of civilisation here presented is such that it might be condoned if, to exculpate its own inadequacies, it could say: "Well, it comes off." But when it doesn't one is thrown back on some such thought as Allan Monkhouse expressed last week: "It seems that one of the functions of the novel is to warn us that even in the fullness of life are the seeds of decay."

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## *The Wooden Pillow*

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There once was a man named Grier who went to work in Japan. He fell in love with a girl named O Kaya San. They lived together for a while, and then Grier was recalled to England. O Kaya San was sorry to see him go.

Do you think that is sufficient theme for a novel? Of course you don't. Neither do I. But it is all the theme there is in *The Wooden Pillow*, by Carl Fallas.

We may, indeed, have to decide that, in any sense in which we customarily use the word, *The Wooden Pillow* is not a novel at all. But that does not alter the fact that it is one of the rarest and most delicious books written in English for many years.

I am going to sack this man Grier, send him off the job, right away. We do not learn whether his father was the Vicar of Heckmondwike or a marine store dealer in the East End of London. We do not learn whether he is short or tall, fat or thin, whether he was a diplomatic attaché, a bookmaker or a merchant.

In one place we learn, accidentally as it were, that he is in his early twenties. That is literally all we know about Grier, and it is a novelist's job, if he wants us to be interested in his characters, to give us something to be interested in.

Grier is a mere name, a mere pair of eyes, through which Mr. Fallas has chosen to look at Japan. What makes this book so fascinating is the things the man sees; what makes it a work of art is the beautiful

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simplicity of the language in which the seeing is recorded.

Let us look, one by one, at these two phases of the book.

First the things seen. No date is anywhere mentioned, but now and then people speak of the Russo-Japanese war as an event which is in the immediate past. We must assume, then, that the Japan we are looking at is the Japan of about 25 years ago. There are no cinemas, motor-cars have not replaced rickshaws; electric light is in few houses; the national dress is almost everywhere worn.

That, then, is the Japan we are shown: a country that has not yet cut the cable binding it to its past.

Selecting here and there with a discrimination that permits us to see the good and the bad, Mr. Fallas constructs his book out of an infinity of tiny incidents, each one perfectly conceived and beautifully rendered.

We attend a geisha entertainment and a play at a theatre. We see a father arranging with a professional middleman for his daughter to enter the ranks of the registered prostitutes; we see a burial in a wood with a little snowstorm of paper prayers showering down into the grave; and the burial of a pet frog.

“At the foot of the grave—the smallest Grier had ever seen—there was a red earthenware vessel hardly bigger than a thimble. It was full to the brim of water.

“Yoshino informed him with enchanting simplicity: ‘For frog.’

“O Kaya San was trying with the point of a thin twig to remove several grains of soil that lay on the surface of the water. . . . The water was for the spirit of the frog, in case that spirit should by chance return to the garden of its material delight.

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“Grier asked briefly: ‘To drink?’

“Yoshino could not think of the word she needed to reply, if she knew it at all. Placing her hands together with thumbs linked, and raising them to her forehead, she made a curving movement with her body, as if taking a header. The pot of water was for the ghostly wanderer to dive into, to swim round, and to disport itself in the manner that is contenting to the hearts of all frogs.

“On the banner attached to the tomb-stick was written a poem which Kaya had composed as the frog’s epitaph and presented to its mistress:

“‘If potato-skin  
Not greedily eating,  
Then still alive  
In Yoshino’s garden.’”

I have given this rather long extract because it leads on to the second point: the language in which this book is written. It is years since I have read a book in which the manner was so perfectly attuned to the matter. The writing flows on with a grave and gracious simplicity which is attained only by the most subtle and scrupulous exercise of literary talent.

This writing of Mr. Fallas’s is, so far as I know, unique in England to-day. Without a redundant word, it hits off its image perfectly every time. It belongs to his subject and to his era: it has affinities with painting on silk fans, with small porcelain figures, with all minute and exquisite delicacies.

It may be that the Japan here depicted no longer exists; for myself I am in no position to say whether it ever existed; it is enough that the author has caused it to exist within the covers of this book. They are the double doors to a little shrine laden with the



offerings of a spirit that has looked on beauty and known how to make tribute.

The sadness of all lost lovely things has here a celebrant that the reading public would do well to encourage. We have plenty of big bow-wows. Do not let them drown this still small voice.

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## Grey Granite

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There was published this week a book called *Tendencies of the Modern Novel*. The work now being done in eight countries is considered, a different author surveying the novels of each country. England falls to Mr. Hugh Walpole, "and throughout this article," says Mr. Walpole, "when I say English I mean British."

That lets in Scotland, whether the Scottish Nationalists like it or not; and when you let in Scotland you let in Lewis Grassic Gibbon.

With most of what Mr. Walpole has to say about the British novel I am in agreement; with his selection of significant names I should be inclined to pick a quarrel here and there. Some of those whom he looks upon as the vanguard seem to me to perform nothing but the office which Batley and Dewsbury perform for the clothing trade; for in Batley and Dewsbury suits of once-classic cut are chewed up and regurgitated in a material which will be fashioned exactly on the lines of the old suits, but without their lasting quality.

I have read but one novel by Lewis Grassic Gibbon, and I must conclude that Mr. Walpole has not read even one; otherwise, I cannot imagine that he would omit, as he does, the name of this writer from his list of significant contemporary novelists.

I had often been urged to read *Sunset Song* and *Cloud Howe*, but somehow the books never came my way. Then I read a book in which Mr. Gibbon

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had collaborated; it left me anxious to acquaint myself with the undiluted work of an obviously remarkable mind.

Now comes the opportunity. *Grey Granite* completes the trilogy which *Sunset Song* and *Cloud Howe* began; and no reader need be affrighted by that. The book is complete and memorable, quickly understandable through and through, on its own.

The scene is the imaginary Scottish town of Duncairn, an industrial town set with the sea on one hand and the wild hills and moors on the other. That is to say, it is a perfect setting for the two strands which are woven into the bone and marrow of the book: the skirl and dither of contemporary effort and conflict, love and hate, and the broad lap of the eternities in which they make their little cry.

These two elements of the book are given flesh and blood in the persons of Chris Colquhoun and her son Ewan. The present volume suggests admirably the storms through which the life of Chris already has passed. She has had two husbands; she has known ups and downs of estate; and now, almost beggared, she is helping to run a boarding-house in Duncairn. She is only in her late thirties; her son is nearly twenty; and it would have been nice and comfortable to show her declining gracefully upon his budding strength, the storms clearing from her dauntless brow.

What, actually, we are shown is still blow on blow raining upon Chris's head, driving her deeper and deeper upon whatever elemental strength may be found when, layer after layer, illusion is shed; while Ewan rushes headlong into the troubled spates of his day, first blazing with a reformer's zeal for seeing the fruit of his labour, then accepting the hardest lesson of all: that the zealot may work and work and

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do no more than leave his own corpse rotting on the lowest foothills of his hope.

The book ends with Ewan marching away to London at the head of a Communist procession, while Chris goes back to work single-handed the small farm on which she had been born.

We leave her sitting on the hillside near her home. "But she still sat on as one by one the lights went out and the rain came, beating the stones about her, and falling all that night while she still sat there, presently feeling no longer the touch of the rain or hearing the sound of the lapwings going by."

Notice the almost monosyllabic structure of that sentence. From end to end of the book Mr. Gibbon has barred out Latinisms and all rotund circumlocutions. His writing is encrusted with uncouth but moving Doric, many of the words unknown to our Southern tongue, but they sing in the texture of the sentences and keep the mind in a constant amaze at the richness which speech may have in these days when thin-worn counters are the common currency.

Mr. Gibbon has, too, his own way with punctuation, making here a comma do the duty of a full-stop, there doing without even the comma; but the result is its own justification, and long passages of this prose may be crooned as James Joyce expects his words to be crooned; but here you are crooning sense that is recognisable by the mind as well as the ear.

And as Mr. Gibbon is not afraid to lift up his prose to the hills, so is he not afraid to take it down into the gutter. Guttersnipes abound in the book. They speak their own words, forthright and undisguised; they are shown busy about their own concerns; and if there is anywhere in contemporary fiction a better picture of the human waste material of Progress I have yet to find it.

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Because this book is a living thing you will like it intensely or dislike it intensely; but what I think cannot be gainsaid is that it is an important contribution to the British novel and a revelation of the vitality which abides in the British tongue.

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## *Good-bye, Mr. Chips*

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Mr. James Hilton wrote *Good-bye, Mr. Chips* in a few days. He is not a writer who lays great store by "inspiration," but he does himself believe that, in the writing of this small book, he was vouchsafed some extra virtue: that there was some special lilt to the pen, which gave the whole thing a roundness, a completeness, which a writer recognises when it comes.

As Jules Verne, living peacefully near Amiens, was able to project his imagination round the world, or below the sea, or into the firmament, so Mr. Hilton, without going to Russia, was able to conjure up convincingly the Russian atmosphere in *Knight Without Armour*, and was able, without having been in Tibet, to make Tibet so real in *Lost Horizon* that he was rightly awarded the Hawthornden Prize.

And now the mind which made those extensive explorations has turned to an intensive exploration. *Good-bye, Mr. Chips*, is an exploration of the mind of one man; and there are few men in recent fiction whom I feel I know more intimately than Mr. Chips.

We watch him growing under our eyes till he is as ripe and mellow as a peach on a south wall in September, and as full of warmth and sunlight.

He was a master at a school called Brookfield, not a first-rate school, but "the sort of school which, when mentioned, would sometimes make snobbish people confess that they thought they had heard of it."

And as Brookfield was not first-rate, neither was

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Mr. Chipping's degree. He was not very articulate. His discipline in class was not too good. He was just a commonplace fellow who became wise and lovely because when life offered a gift he took it and allowed it to add something to his stature. You might, indeed, call this book a portrait of a man growing old beautifully.

It begins when Chips's life is as good as over. "When you are getting on in years (but not ill, of course), you get very sleepy at times, and the hours seem to pass like lazy cattle moving across a landscape." That's the opening; and all Mr. Chips's life then slowly unrolls in a series of reminiscences.

Mr. Chips's marriage to a girl young enough to be his daughter; her death while the first rapture was still upon them; his love growing out towards the boys, thousands of them, generation after generation, as he got old and grey; the passing of every colleague he had known till he was, by very ancientry, august and institutional; the war reaping down what he had sown; his late recall to command the school; his final retirement . . . an old, old man who couldn't tear himself away from the soil where all his roots had gone down . . . living in lodgings just outside the gates . . . strolling over to watch the cricket in the summer, having new boys in to muffins by the fireside in the winter . . . growing older and older . . . going, going, gone. That's the story of Mr. Chips.

How easy it would have been to sink, with such a theme as this, into a sentimental quagmire! But not for a moment are we so much as near the edge. The man is too vital; and, what is astonishing in so short a work, you are able to see his growth from a young man in danger of going to seed to a middle-aged man with a quickening belief in his country and his job, and an old man full of years and honour.

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"Just as marriage had added something, so did bereavement," and that is one factor in the enchantment that Mr. Chips lays upon us. From life or from death he could draw a reinforcement to the qualities which made him at the end so complete and harmonious a being.

His humour became a tradition at Brookfield. Classics were his subject and he loved a wisecrack in a foreign tongue. So when a mysterious kind of rissole began to appear during the war he called it "abhorrendum"—"meat to be abhorred." There are many as good as that.

It is not fair to give away much from a short book, but Mr. Hilton will excuse me if I give one instance of the economy with which he gets a perfect effect. Thirty-three lines tell the whole story of "young Grayson," whose father had sailed on the Titanic. When news came through that he was among the saved Chips told the boy how pleased he was.

"A quiet, nervous boy. And it was Grayson Senior, not Junior, with whom Chips was destined later to condole."

So Chips remained like a gracious tree under whose shade the generations passed, or like the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. And when it was all over, and he was just a queer old man, full of gentle eccentricities, living outside the gate, all the faces marched by him. "Where are you all? . . . Where have you gone to?"

The last of his famous jokes came from his dying lips. He heard someone say: "Pity he never had any children."

"Thousands of 'em," he murmured. "Thousands of 'em . . . and all boys."

Here is triumphant proof that a little book can be



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a great book. Mr. Chips deserves a place in the gallery of English characters. Never have I known more beautifully rendered a man at perfect peace with life, a finer setting forth of what happy dreams may come when you are old and grey and full of sleep.

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## *Seven Gothic Tales*

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“Isak Dinesen” is the name chosen for writing purposes by a titled Danish woman, and English is the language she chooses to write in. This is not the least remarkable thing about *Seven Gothic Tales*, for one would suppose that the language here employed was native and familiar, polished by long exercise and exquisite care to an unaccustomed point and brilliance.

The feeling one has in reading Conrad that he wrestled for his effects—even though, in his finer moments, the wrestling is with an angel who surrendered its blessing—is absent here. The *Seven Gothic Tales* are written in an English limpid as clear water; cold, at times, as ice.

But though the manner of this book is so magnificent, and though its matter seems, to me, so exciting and enraptured, I hesitated for a long time before the thought that people are said not to like volumes of stories. I put the hesitation aside because, in the first place, these are not short stories as the term is usually understood. They are little novels. In the second place, it would be a sin of cowardice not to commend a work so deeply infused with the attributes of greatness.

I have not once, till now, in all the time that I have been reviewing books, said, “Here is a book that is great not by comparison with its contemporaries, but by any standard that you care to apply. This belongs to the company of the world’s great books.” Yet that is what I say and feel about *Seven Gothic Tales*.

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It is encouraging to find such a book being written in our day. It is flattering that its author should have chosen English for her medium. It is significant that the work comes from out of that group of little countries which have given to civilisation the Town Hall of Stockholm, the sculptures of Milles, the Copenhagen ceramics of Malinowski and Henning, the glass of Orrefors and much exquisite work in silver.

The Scandinavian Renaissance is something to thank God for.

So far as the recent literature of those countries is concerned, I have found it marred by something dark and turgid, an obstinate refusal to spread its wings to the sun. But that feeling is completely banished from *Seven Gothic Tales*. Tragedy, indeed, is in them; but they have a sweep and vigour that are all-embracing.

For their best description we must go to "Isak Dinesen" herself. She is speaking of the work of young Anders Kube, the poet, and might well be speaking of her own: "He had a mind which strangely enlarged everything he met. Under the handling of his thoughts things became gigantic, like those huge shadows of themselves upon the mist which travellers in mountains meet and are terrified of, gigantic and somehow grotesque, like objects playing about a little outside of human reason."

"Centaur, fauns, and water deities" have their part in these Gothic tales, which are always "a little outside human reason." That is a difficult region to explore and make credible; but, seeing that we are not creatures of pure reason, say what we will, it is a legitimate and indeed important region for any artist who would suggest something of the total possibility of human experience. And so in *The Supper at Elsinore* we sit down to dine unquestioningly with a pirate's ghost and are neither dismayed nor astounded

when, in "The Monkey," an elegant old lady is metamorphosed into an ape.

It is not my intention to say anything about the matter of these seven little novels. Their scope covers many parts of the world, and the time of most of them is round about the beginning of last century. The matter is always fresh and of the author's own minting; the manner is the historic manner of the greatest tale-tellers: the story within the story. In the course of one of the tales you may find four or five subsidiary tales, each contributing to the perfection of the finished work, as the separate convolutions of a shell contribute to the final murmur that stirs through its whorled galleries.

Isak Dinesen commands a lovely English style. She sees a sailing ship making a northern port in winter "coated with ice until it looked as if it were drawn with chalk upon a dark sea." She has the power to bring everything before you like that in pictures which you cannot fail to see, for, clearly, her mind is caparisoned with a richness of imagery that is, to say the least, unusual. She moves familiarly among unfamiliar things, giving the impression, so rarely conveyed by a writer, of being compounded of subtler clay than ours.

She leaves, indeed, unmistakably upon the mind the impression of the great gulf that lies between genius and talent. Here is superb technical ability allied to the gift of the gods, a beautifully fashioned mouthpiece for the wind that bloweth where it listeth.

Salavin

Three of Georges Duhamel's novels about the Pasquier family have recently been published in England, and beautiful novels they are. Those of us who thus made our first acquaintance with Duhamel's work, and tried to shout as loudly as we could the good news that here was a novelist of classic proportions, were only echoing what the French reading public had long and gladly recognised. This recognition was so deep that Duhamel has recently been elected one of the "immortal forty" who compose the French Academy.

I should think that when that election was made, Duhamel was honoured, above all, as the creator of Louis Salavin. Salavin was introduced to the French public in four novels, and the French public took him to their hearts. Those four novels have now been translated by Miss Gladys Billing, and, under the title *Salavin*, they are published in one volume.

Who is Salavin? He is a Quixote of the gutters. Like the mighty Don, he is troubled by dreams that transcend the possibility of capture. He struggles, he suffers, he dies; and in our memories he lives immortally. "We cannot judge him—only love him," says a woman who watched his sacrifice; and that will do for his epitaph. Perhaps alongside it we may set the saying of a doctor who, too, had known Salavin: "We must none of us despair of humanity."

Salavin's last comment on his own case was simply

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this : "I was not made for great events." But what are great events? This grey and shabby clerk possessed by his dæmon is to me as tragically moving as Hamlet questioning the enigma of his destiny or Othello destroying the thing he loved.

"How can a person resign himself to being nothing but what he is?" Salavin asks, and all the trouble began from that. There he was, nearly thirty years old when first we meet him, living with his mother in a dingy little apartment in Paris. And not only living with her, but dependent on her as a child would be.

There was nothing "to him," as we say, with his shabby clothes, his short sight, his shrinking and timidity. He could do nothing but push a pen. "If I were the kind of person who could do one thing well, no matter what, I would not be the sort of fellow I am."

So he confided one night to a man he met in a bar. The whole of the first book is made up of the long, rambling confession which Salavin poured out that night.

"I have nothing out of the ordinary to tell you. My adventures are entirely of the kind that take place within." And, indeed, it seems from this instalment that Salavin is what modern jargon calls an introvert, brooding upon his own insufficiency.

The second book is in the form of a diary which Salavin keeps. He examines all the things a man might do, dismisses them one by one as beyond him, and then decides that a man might at least be a saint!

Of all the windmills at which a poor, deluded Quixote ever levelled a lance! The diary records his progress in this strange adventure, his successes, his failures.

One of the most beautiful and tragic things in the book is his association at this time with the boy J. B.,

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replacing the money J. B. has stolen from the till, and, when J. B. is sacked, meeting him still, pressing upon him money, his coat, and, one foul night, his very boots.

Chastity, too, belongs to a saint, and Salavin, now married, brings his wife and mother to despair by his queer and unexplained behaviour.

And here let us note with what beauty Duhamel has drawn the portraits of these two women—portraits that are masterpieces of pity for all the dumb and suffering women of the world.

The quest for saintliness by chastity, self-inflicted torture, religion, all comes to nothing but the inevitable seizing of illness upon the wretched, starved body of Salavin.

The next book is third-person narration. It draws a most vivid picture of the activities of a small group of Communists, plotting in the back-quarters of a cobbler's shop. This gives Duhamel a fine opportunity to paint a gallery of portraits: the fierce Marxian realists, the "intellectual" hangers-on, the Socialists of the "old school," sentimental yearners with no fight in them.

Salavin is a mere spectator; but his arrest when the gang is rounded up causes the death of his mother and precipitates him into the fourth and final stage of his career.

Now, to follow his gleam, his will o' the wisp, what you will, he leaves his wife, appears in Tunis under an assumed name, and throws his emaciated body into every breach. He fights the plague, he gives his meagre blood in transfusion, he sits at the sick-beds of men unknown. In a fever of renunciation, he seeks to *give* himself; yet never does he taste the grateful flavour of acceptance.

That is the tragedy of Salavin. All that he does seems to him to be flung in the face of a grey and sullen in-

difference. Yet he cannot cease from flinging his small and unacceptable gifts.

And he dies, grey and poverty-stricken, maimed in body and mind, back in the dingy apartment where so much of his life had been spent, with none to see or mourn his passing save the woman who is grey and poverty-stricken as himself.

Was he mad? If you like; but his sad ghost haunts the memory, the ghost of a fool in Christ, of whom the world was not worthy.

Sparkenbroke

Piers Tenniel, Lord Sparkenbroke, the hero of Charles Morgan's new novel, *Sparkenbroke*, was a great writer both of prose and poetry.

Throughout this long book you will not find that Sparkenbroke had a single friend, though he had a tolerant affection for George Hardy, a country doctor: such an affection as Byron might have had for his bear.

Sparkenbroke's soul was "like a star, and dwelt apart." Three things were important to him: the creation of works of art; the loving of women; and death. Each of these was to him, mystically, a death by which the artist might pass, through resurrection, to unspeakable richness.

This, you will see, is no ordinary theme. It is an examination of the nature of artistic creation and of its relation to those other great realities, love and death.

A letter from Keats is printed at the opening of the book; Sparkenbroke was sensitively aware of Keats's reaction to life. But nowhere in the book is there mentioned the point at which the intuitions of these two touched and coalesced. That is, in the lines

. . . and for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Called him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath.
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain. . . .

That, literally, is what Sparkenbroke did: he

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ceased upon the midnight, in the tomb of his forefathers—that tomb which plays so large a part in the book—that tomb which is associated with our first glimpse of Sparkenbroke the child and our last glimpse of Sparkenbroke the man.

It was at the Dorsetshire home of the family, that tomb which was known as the Sparkenbroke Mound. It was cut into the side of a hill, the sod for its roof and walls, a grille giving admission. You could look through the grille and see the Sparkenbroke coffins ranged upon their shelves.

Mr. Morgan has achieved with both tenderness and certitude the painting of the child's portrait: the child whom one feels to be already predestinate, already sharply aware of life external to the body. He was aware of spirit that rolls through all things, distinct from "spirits," those vulgar bogies of the common fancy.

A brother, for a foolish prank, locked the child into the Sparkenbroke Mound. For hours in the dead of a winter night he was there, and when they brought him out his face shone with Sinaitic fire. That was young Sparkenbroke's wedding night to the bride of death. He did not fear her any more. And perhaps from then began that trouble with the heart that was to finish him at last.

From that point the narrative moves straight forward to Sparkenbroke's maturity. He is famous and infamous as Byron was famous and infamous, and for the same reasons. He was seeking the Grail among a succession of women.

Mary Leward, little more than a child, of extraordinary beauty, came within the line of Sparkenbroke's quest, and then all was set for the elaboration of the human story which Mr. Morgan has used to elucidate his spiritual theme.

George Hardy, the village doctor, in love with

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Mary, warned her what to expect of Sparkenbroke. "He will search you and find nothing, and throw you away."

But with Mary it was not a question of choice : it was a question of necessity. Experience might whisper of wisdom, but enchantment was stronger than experience. The moth does not argue about the chemistry of combustion : it flies to the flame.

To Mary, Sparkenbroke was all compelling flame. George Hardy, whom she at last married, was "a part of her habitual life." With him she was "peacefully happy." But that peace, which from the outside looked so solid, was fragility itself if Sparkenbroke cared to raise his finger.

The whole book, once it has stepped beyond Piers's childhood, is the story of Mary's bedazzled fluttering into and out of the light that was Sparkenbroke. It is not for me to record its progress or reveal its outcome. In England and Italy the drama is set against enchanting backgrounds, and Mary grows upon the senses as a superbly realised woman caught in the fatal toils of necessity.

Is Sparkenbroke himself equally real? Not to me. He has a touch of spiritual melodrama. I tired both of his own expositions of love, art and death and of Mr. Morgan's expositions of the essential artist : how he works, how he eats and sleeps, how he feels when Elisha's mantle is on him, how naked when it is not.

A touch of Barnum is on this Byron of our day : he tends to be a commentary on the obstetrics of art rather than himself a birth.

The other characters are convincing people, though none of them has that piercing quality of reality which makes Mary Leward a person who will long remain in the mind. There is Etty, the wife who generously finances Sparkenbroke's absences from her bed

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and board; George the doctor, the scholarly parson who is his father, and Helen his sister.

There are no other characters who matter in this long book. But these few are enough to hold together an argument that goes down to the foundations of all we may ask concerning the nature of art and its purpose in the world.

It is a remarkable achievement to have used as the medium of that argument a tale of human interest and ecstasy and pity.

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## *Eyeless in Gaza*

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Anthony Beavis, the leading character in Mr. Aldous Huxley's new novel, *Eyeless in Gaza*, was, at the beginning, a "detached philosopher."

He didn't want to love, and he didn't want to be loved, though he liked to have ample opportunity for non-committal sensual experience. But no responsibilities, please, and no emotions. That was Anthony's attitude. He just wanted to get on with his work, which was the accumulation of sociological data.

The theme of this long novel is Anthony's growing sense that thought and knowledge were not enough. He had been pursuing them as ends. He saw that they could never be more than means, and that, unless he could implement them in experience, his life would be barren and sterile.

He ended up as a member of a body of people whose doctrines seemed to blend those of Tolstoy and the Quakers. Non-aggression in any circumstances. A stern fight for the suppression of all that made for personal emphasis and aggrandisement. A sincere attempt to merge the individual in the well-being of the whole.

And yet he knew it couldn't be done. It could only be attempted. The point, he insisted, is that one demands of oneself the achievement of the impossible.

"The point is that, even with the best will in the world, the separate, evil universe of a person or a physical pattern can never unite itself completely with other lives and beings, or the totality of life and

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beings. . . . There must be no relaxation. . . . But even for the best of us, the consummation is still immeasurably remote."

It is not till late in the book that this illumination comes to Anthony. For the most part, the story is of his unregenerate years.

There are two things which particularly differentiate this book from most novels. One is the manner of its composition. It slips about through the years. We begin with Anthony at the age of forty-two. Then we slip back thirty years. You never know at what point of childhood, youth or manhood the story will next be taken up.

It is the same with all the characters. An episode of childhood is left uncompleted while the story jumps forward to complete an episode of maturity which was begun a few chapters ago. Then back we go to finish the episode of childhood. After that we take up some other end that has been left loose.

This sounds confusing, but it is not meaningless fooling with method. It strengthens all that the author has to say. For example, when you have been made aware quite early that one of the characters committed suicide in manhood, there is an extraordinary poignancy in detecting, in the flashing, mixed glimpses of his life, the unconsidered symptoms which are going to add up and make suicide inevitable.

The second thing which struck me about the novel was that, though its concluding philosophical message was that ye love one another, Mr. Huxley seems to shrink from humanity with a cold, queasy stomach.

"We look at the universe," he writes, "with a certain kind of physico-mental apparatus." The mental and physical parts of his own equipment seem never to have come to terms. The very functions of the body seem to fill him with loathing.

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"What a bore one's carcass is when it goes in the least wrong! Even when it goes right, for that matter. Such a lot of unmodern inconveniences. I sometimes bitterly resent this physical predestination to scatology and obscenity."

Another character remarks: "You can't do without your fellow humans, and yet when you are with them they make you sick."

A young woman notes that her husband smells "like sour milk," and another that the man she is engaged to finds physical love "dirty and criminal."

And this shrinking from "vile bodies," which gives Mr. Huxley's approach to humanity something of the quality of a scientist's, aghast at the turmoil he sees beneath the microscope, has its counter-part in preoccupation with what repels him.

A certain Staithes enchants a drawing-room with a revolting description of how an ingredient of scents is obtained from civet cats.

Most extraordinary of all is an account of how a man and woman were sunbathing when a dog fell upon them from a passing air-plane. "'On the roof of his house it was. And we had no clothes on. Like the Garden of Eden. And then, out of the blue, down came that dog—and exploded, literally exploded, I tell you.' She threw out her hands in a violent gesture. 'Dog's blood from head to foot. We were drenched—but *drenched*.'"

This preoccupation with the morbid extends to the choice of characters. The story on to which so lofty a philosophy is grafted is largely a chronicle of the squalid nights and days of whores, lechers, pederasts, impotent men and over-desirous women.

To see Mr. Huxley snuffing about in this malodorous assemblage makes one think of an overbred hound which has slipped the leash and discovered the

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sensuous delights of a lamp-post singularly rich in historical associations.

I think the conclusion he has reached—that the increase of righteousness in the world is a personal matter that will not be advanced by Communism, Fascism, or any other political arrangement of the fashions of living: I think that that conclusion is acceptable to any mind which deeply ponders the manifestations of the world about us to-day; but I wish he had reached it by considering the doings of a less repellent set of people.

The book left a profound malaise in my mind: a conviction that a great and rare talent is diminished in operation by a schism between its mental and physical components.





## *Miscellaneous*



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*Whitaker's Almanack*

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Men who are at all in the habit of frequenting those cheerful places of popular assembly the bars of public-houses are aware of a human weakness for disputation. Amicable and sententious as the drinking man may be for a length of time commensurate with the strength of his head, there comes a moment when the lawyer in him will out.

A remark, not necessarily addressed to him, impinges, nevertheless, upon his consciousness, and he is moved to rebut and refute with a strength and conviction of which you would not think him capable if you saw him engaged in the business of merely earning his bread. That it was Manna, and not Colorado, who won the 2000 Guineas in 1926 becomes a point of obstinate conviction for which he is prepared to go to the stake.

There was once a man named Joseph Whitaker, and he edited the *Gentleman's Magazine*. He wrote therein under the charming name of Sylvanus Urban; and Sylvanus Urban, I am told, was "the Court of Appeal in those days for intellectual disputes." I am quite prepared to admit that that was so: every dispute is fundamentally a matter of the intellect; and the readers of the *Gentleman's Magazine* in the 'fifties of last century were doubtless a fine lot, with their trousers strapped under their boots and all.

It was lucky for posterity that, though Sylvanus Urban was in theory an infallible being, a mine of deep and various information, Joseph Whitaker was in

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practice but too well aware that one of these days he might be caught out. Therefore, he began to arm himself at all points so that he might bristle with facts even as a porcupine does with quills. He seized upon anything and everything that was a Fact. Dates, tables, memoranda were culled from Blue Books and any other sort of books, and soon Joseph Whitaker's commonplace book, secreted in the drawer of Sylvanus Urban, in the office of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, became worth its weight in gold.

Then Joseph Whitaker, having in the meantime established the *Bookseller*, which continues to exist to-day as the *Publisher and Bookseller*, began to be worried by the demands of a growing family. Fortunately, though he had for ten years ceased to be "Sylvanus Urban," he had kept his commonplace book up to date. He had furnished it with an index and now he resolved to publish it. In December 1868 *Whitaker's Almanack* for 1869 made its appearance, and 36,000 copies were subscribed for before publication. From that day to this *Whitaker* has remained the standard work for the settlement of "intellectual disputes."

The 1933 edition is before me now. I am awed by its appearance of self-sufficiency. I look at it as the boys looked at Goldsmith's schoolmaster :

"and still the wonder grew
That one small head could carry all he knew."

I remember that Sherlock Holmes, applying his penetrating intellect to a problem: "An almanack . . . in common use . . . a given number of pages . . . double columns," cried triumphantly, *Whitaker's*! "Though reserved in its earlier vocabulary, Watson, it becomes, if I remember aright, quite garrulous towards the end."

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That was at the end of the 'eighties, and whether *Whitaker* could afford to be garrulous then I do not know. Certainly he is not garrulous now. Never was knowledge more brutal, more hard, more matter-of-fact. The book sprays you with information like a machine-gun turned on the serried ranks of ignorance, each well-established and pithy pellet fetching up in the middle of its mark.

And on what varied matters the book turns its regard! A glance through the 20,000 references in the index shows me *Whitaker's* mind leaping lightly from Accra to Accrington, from Betelgeuse to Bethlehem, dealing indifferently with the ecliptic and the epileptic, taking in staghunting, stainless steel and Stalin with one noble sweep of imagination's pinion. Lima or Limehouse, it matters not; nor is the close time for crabs beneath the notice of a regard at once infinitesimal and infinite. I can find the distance of the earth from the sun and likewise I can make myself acquainted with phenomena whose operations I have no desire to witness, such as high tide at Lossiemouth.

Many strange and interesting facts spring before the mind as the fingers idly flip these pages. I learn that Nijni Novgorod is now called Gorky; that Cherra Poonjee in Assam is the wettest place in the world; that at Lascelles in Australia 200,000 mice weighing approximately three tons were caught in a single night; that the housekeeper at Buckingham Palace is named Mrs. Moore; that there are 542 levers in the signal box at St. Enoch's Station, Glasgow; that Big Ben is so named after Sir Benjamin Hill, First Commissioner of Works when the bell was hung in 1856.

But think not that *Whitaker* is concerned merely with the amusing tittle-tattle of life. All the grave exigencies of existence come within the range of his omniscience. Birth, marriage, divorce and death will hold no complications for a mind armed with the lucid

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passports through all the changing scenes of life that *Whitaker* provides and countersigns. Even the income-tax is robbed of half its terror when the cold English of *Whitaker* is brought to bear upon the terrifying and involved illiteracy of the official forms.

And you cannot catch *Whitaker* out. His index proliferates in cross references, so that you find what you want whether you look, for example, under "Order of Succession to the Throne," or "Throne, Order of Succession," or "Succession—to the Throne."

He is up to date, too. He gets in Mr. Roosevelt's election to the American Presidency and many other facts which I should have thought would beat him by a head.

Never was there so faithful a following of Captain Cuttle's excellent advice: "When found, make a note of." And as the first great Whitaker began the formation of this coral reef, adding profitable polyp to polyp, so now his descendants continue the work till the reef pushes out its promontories into all the oceans of knowledge. The present editor is Colonel C. W. Whitaker, Joseph Whitaker's son. Mr. Edgar Whitaker, another son, is business manager, and a grandson, Mr. Haddon Whitaker, is on the spot to ensure that *Whitaker's* for a long time to come shall be Whitaker's in fact as well as in name.

It is chastening to think of all these Whitakers industriously adding to "Sylvanus Urban's" commonplace book, conducting their great "comb-out" through all the lurking funkholes of information, so that when Facts come on parade with the opening of each new year not one significant recruit shall fail to answer the call.

The Great Migration

The wanderings of the Children of Israel make up a story which is among the best-known in the world. We cannot forget it if we would.

"Forty years long was I grieved with this generation" we hear every time we go to church. The "Land of Promise" that was looked on from Pisgah's height has entered into the stuff of our speech, and he who looks back from the task once begun is said to hanker after the "feshpots of Egypt."

From Egypt, across the Red Sea by miraculous intervention, and so, after forty years of wandering, to Palestine. So the story goes. And now here comes Mr. J. Fitzgerald Lee with a book called *The Great Migration* to say what nonsense such a story is.

You can divide Mr. Lee's book into three parts. In the first place, he asks a pertinent question: "Why on earth should forty years be necessary to make a journey of forty leagues?" Then he points out that in Central America and in Egypt there are evidences of an identical culture. And, thirdly, he says that between those two widely separated points you can trace a route, going up through North America, across the Bering Sea, and bearing thence in a general line westward and southward to Egypt—a route which is plotted out, so to speak, by items from this same culture which you find in South America and in Egypt.

From all this he concludes that the Great Migration—the event which more deeply than any other has


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bitten into the consciousness of the Hebrews—was no mere ramble which to-day might be a week-end jaunt by car, but a mighty movement of a race, far back in the dim beginnings of time, from one end of the world to the other.

This is a fascinating and stimulating theory; and Mr. Lee, soaked in authorities till his pages drip with them, has nevertheless succeeded in presenting it with an ease of diction which makes his book as easy to read as it is difficult to forget.

That there was, centuries after the Great Migration, an exodus from Egypt he admits, but in the Old Testament story which tells of that exodus the scribes recalled, and the initiate knew that they recalled, not a recent happening of comparatively small importance, but the vast epic journey of the wandering Jews. "Egypt," seen thus, becomes but a metaphor for the far land of the Hebrews' origin.

That ancient architecture, culture, customs, folklore and legends have much in common in tropical America and the Valley of the Nile has been established, says Mr. Lee, by a multitude of witnesses. Humboldt, in Mexico, thought "Montezuma's ancestors must have dwelt on the banks of the Nile." Another traveller wrote of pyramids seen in Tutupepec and of images near them "exactly like what I have seen in Egypt." The German historian Vater said: "It is surprising to see how exactly the ancient Mexicans must have copied the Egyptian style in their pictures and statues."

So instance after instance is accumulated of travellers who observed the facts, but interpreted them in the opposite sense from Mr. Lee's. He accumulates, too, case after case in which travellers have seen a resemblance between American aborigines and Jews. Let Penn's evidence stand as typical. "As to the origin of these Indians," he wrote, "I am ready to

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believe them to be of the Jewish race. . . . They agree in rites, they reckon by moons, they offer their first fruits."

Very striking is the comparison which Mr. Lee makes between the legends of the early books of the Old Testament and the *Pepol Vuh*, Mexico's book of ancient legends. The creation, the "fall," the Deluge (with a Nahua in place of Noah), the tree and the serpent all appear so faithfully in the Mexican book that one of the early missionaries exclaimed: "I verily believe that the Evil Spirit must have supplied these poor people with a spurious edition of our Bible."

Then there is the Biblical expression "There were giants in those days," backed by Humboldt's discovery of vast human bones in Mexico. "I do not know of any present race of men so huge and tall," wrote Humboldt, "as those whose skeletons we have found here." Evidence of great longevity among these people is produced, too.

These, then, thinks Mr. Lee, were the fathers of the Hebrew race, who, untold centuries ago, trekked north from Tropical America and came at last to the frozen wastes of the Bering Sea. That sea, he maintains, not the Red Sea, was the place of the great passing over. The Red Sea is not mentioned in the Hebrew Old Testament. What is translated as "Red Sea" means "Sea of dividing." Here names are called in to help: Terah, "he who migrated"; Abraham, "he who passed over." "All these important names . . . refer to some far greater crossing over or migration than that given in the book on Exodus."

The cloud by day and the fire by night that led the Israelites on are to be interpreted in the light of a passage which the geographer Strahlenburg wrote when describing the mountain ranges on the Asiatic side of the Bering Strait: "The volcanoes shoot out

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clouds of smoke in the daytime and very high jets of flame all night."

Across the Strait, then, Mr. Lee takes his migrating horde, and we cannot follow them in all their wanderings. But here are two of those fascinating parallels of which his book is full. They come into China, and there he identifies one peak of the Thian Shan mountains on the western frontier with Sinai, where Moses spoke with God "and wist not that the skin of his face shone." Ritter's geography tells of this mountain and how workmen collect salt from it, "and when they come down from their work their faces shine with a strange and startling brightness and light."

Then the wanderers reach Central Asia, the ancient Scythian wilderness, and here it was, says Mr. Lee, that the "miracle" of the manna came to them. "In the morning the dew lay round about the host. And when the dew that lay was gone up, behold upon the face of the wilderness lay a small round thing, small as the hoar frost on the ground. And when the sun waxed hot it melted." Mr. Lee produces testimony, from a traveller concerning a "substance frequently taken to market to the city of Tobolsk. It must be gathered before sunrise, for when the sun shines upon it it melts away. . . . It is found in grains about the size of green peas."

"There is no part of the world," Mr. Lee asserts, "in which anything similar to the manna of the Hebrew legends has been discovered except the lands bordering on the deserts of Central Asia."

So the Hebrews fight their way onwards, leaving offshoots here and there, and these, Mr. Lee thinks, may well be the ancestors of races that exist to-day—for example, the inhabitants of Kafiristan and the Ossi of North-west Persia.

Whether you agree or disagree with Mr. Lee—and

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it would be unfair to judge one way or the other from the skeleton of his argument here presented—we must at least agree that he has written an enthralling book. It may well lead to a battle-royal, on paper, among the pundits.

Merely as an interested outsider, I have one bone to pick. Why does Mr. Lee call Winwood Reade an American author? He was the nephew of Charles Reade. He was born in Scotland, educated in England and explored in Africa. I was not aware that he had so much as set foot in America. His *Martyrdom of Man*, crude as it is in places, was a grand pioneer book, and its author is entitled to much more respectful treatment than Mr. Lee gives him.

Parson Woodfoorde's Diary

The Rev. James Woodforde kept a diary from 1758, when he was eighteen years old and beginning his studies at Oxford, until October 1802. He died on New Year's day 1803. During his last quarter of a century he was Rector of Weston Longeville, in Norfolk.

Extracts from the diaries began to be published eleven years ago. Soon there were five volumes, and Mr. John Beresford, their editor, tells us that there is material for another five or six.

Whether he decides to prepare them or not, he has done wisely, meanwhile, in putting the best of the five volumes into one, and here it is : *Woodfoorde, the Diary of a Country Parson*.

Woodfoorde gives us a wonderful picture of English rural life in the second half of the eighteenth century. The most important point about him historically is that he was unimportant.

He lived in a backwater among the smallest fry, nor is there any suggestion that he longed for the main stream. He was content in his lot, a homely bachelor parson, and because he has put down the day-to-day doings of farmers and shepherds, inn-keepers and serving maids, smugglers and minor gentry, he has left us a picture of his times that is hardly likely to be surpassed.

He went to Oxford from Somerset, where his father was a parson, and played the fool there as young men will. "Hearst, Bell and myself, being in Beer,

went under Whitmore's window and abused him very much, as being Dean. He came down and sent us to our Proper Rooms, and then we Huzza'd him again and again. We are to wait on him to-morrow."

There was tremendous drinking at Oxford, and Woodfoorde took a vow "never to get drunk again, when at Greene's rooms in April last I fell down dead and cut my Occiput very bad indeed."

He seems to have kept the vow, though throughout the diary he records an amount of drinking—getting "merry" he calls it—which would disturb most modern heads.

There was plenty to warn him against undue indulgence. When he took a curacy near his father's home he had the example of Brother Jack, who was a lad "too busy with the girls," a smart figure in the uniform of the local militia, and an outrageous drunkard.

"Jack did not come home till near four in the morning. He was much in liquor and quite unhappy. The Devil has great power over him to-day. O Lord, grant him strength from Thy Holy Place to withstand him better *pro futuro*."

There were some cards in that Somersetshire village. There was one "Thos. Speed, of Gallhampton, who came into the Church quite drunk and crazy and made a noise in the Church, called the Singers a Pack of Whoresbirds and gave me a nod or two in the Pulpit."

Here is a dinner for six persons which Woodfoorde served when a curate: "A dish of fine Tench, Ham, and three Fowls boiled, a Plum Pudding, a couple of Ducks roasted, a roasted neck of Pork, a Plumb Tart and an Apple Tart, Pears, Apples and Nuts after dinner; White Wine and red, Beer and Cyder. Coffee and Tea in the evening at six. Hashed Fowl and Duck and Eggs and Potatoes, etc., for supper."

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And "Mr. Rice a Welshman," played on "the Triple Harp."

He was thirty-six when he took over the Norfolk rectory. He had Will Coleman, who was paid four guineas a year, as a personal servant; his nephew Bill, and later his niece Nancy, for company.

He had a head maid (£5 15s. 6d. a year); a lower maid (£2 os. 6d.); a "farming man" (£10) and a boy (10s. 6d.)

That was a comfortable establishment for a bachelor, and all pretty cheap. The tithes brought him in about £260, and the farmers who paid them were always entertained to a "frolick," which means much eating and drinking.

So there he was, settled for life, with cows and sheep and cornland, a good garden, plentiful fishing, a horse to ride, and hounds for coursing.

On the King's birthday he loyally shoots off a blunderbuss on the lawn, but he does not scruple to diddle the King out of his revenue by dealing with "one Richard Andrews, a smuggler," who emits a low whistle at the window and produces teas and silks. "I gave him some Geneva and paid him for the tea at 10s. 6d. per Pd."

He is not squeamish about his company, and is prepared to go fishing with a party which includes "Mr. Custance's mistress, a Miss Sherman."

When his man fell ill of the ague he "gave him a dram of gin at the beginning of the fit and pushed him headlong into one of my ponds," a Spartan remedy which worked, for, being ordered to bed immediately, the man "was better after it."

It was a slothful life, and Woodfoorde's belly got the better of him. "I eat five times a day, and at all times with a proper relish."

Feeding, always prominent in the diary, becomes predominant towards the end. Every day the old

man records what he has had for dinner. Evidently it is the great hour of the day. The very last entry is: "Dinner to-day Rost Beef, etc." And this on a day when "scarce able to put on my Cloaths and with great difficulty get downstairs with help." But Woodfoorde wasn't going to miss his Rost Beef.

So there is your Woodfoorde, a joy for ever, a chronicler of the infinitely little, a memorialist of life's minuteness, but, for that very fact, a burning light upon the actuality of the time in which he lived.



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### *Fisher's "History of Europe"*

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The third and final volume of Mr. H. A. L. Fisher's *History of Europe* is published this week.

"I begin this book," Mr. Fisher wrote in the first volume, "with neolithic man and conclude with Stalin and Mustapha Kemal, Mussolini, and Hitler."

He finds that "between these rough and rugged frontiers there are to be found some prospects flattering to human pride," but he finds no harmony.

"I can see only one emergency following upon another as wave follows upon wave, only one great fact with respect to which, since it is unique, there can be no generalisations, only one safe rule for the historian: that he should recognise in the development of human destinies the play of the contingent and the unforeseen.

"The fact of progress," he adds, "is written plain and large on the page of history; but progress is not a law of nature. The ground gained by one generation may be lost by the next. The thoughts of men flow into the channels which lead to disaster and barbarism."

This third volume, which bears the sub-title "The Liberal Experiment," concludes with the greatest flow of thought and action into the channels of disaster which the world has ever known. The historian lays down his pen with a question: Will the peace be preserved? Can liberty survive?

He has no answer, only a hope that "the Europeans may recall before it is too late that they are trustees for the civilisation of the world."

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Concerning the Great War, Mr. Fisher writes that its tragedy was "that it was fought between the most highly civilised peoples in Europe on an issue which a few level-headed men could easily have composed, and with respect to which ninety-nine per cent. of the population were wholly indifferent."

That is too simple a way of looking at it, for the "issue" on which the war was fought was not the war's cause, but only its occasion. Its cause was the growth of nationalism which is so magnificently traced in these pages, and, side by side with that, the growth of fear. It would have taken more than a few level-headed men to exorcise the dark hallucinations through which Europe groped towards its doom.

The profound historic irony of this book is to be discerned in its tracing of the road by which excellent qualities contributed inevitably to a diabolical outcome. Never was the road to hell paved with such good intentions.

You might call this volume a litany of liberators. It begins with the liberation of France from those who battened on ancient privilege. It recites the names and deeds of those who, here and there, struck their blows for freedom: Mazzini and Cavour, Kossuth and Gambetta.

Excellent work; and splendid were the ideals that inspired it: the love of kind and country, the refusal to be dominated by an alien power.

But out of the very intensity of these feelings developed the evil of hostile nationalism, the intense touchiness for the beloved, newly created thing. Like new knights scanning their correspondence and all on edge if someone has lapsed into "Mister," the new nations scanned their titles of nobility and snorted angrily at any symptom of disrespect.

That situation was bad enough; but Mr. Fisher

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goes on to show how it was aggravated by this: that the nations tended in general to adopt one or other of two conceptions: there were those who thought that the State existed for the happiness of the citizen, and those who thought that the citizen existed for the benefit of the State. Hegel and Marx (the seed of Fascism and Communism) were face to face with Locke and Rousseau (of the people, by the people, for the people).

That, then, is the main thread running through this third volume. We see the inevitable clash, and the emergence of the new world in which the old liberal ideas are besieged by a rising tide of dictation and suppression.

Whence have the dictators come? Consider this list. Mr. Fisher reminds us that the Second International contained Lenin, Mussolini, Briand, Ramsay MacDonald, Liebknecht, Laval, Vandervelde, Pilsudski and Bernard Shaw.

There is still Hitler. Concerning him Mr. Fisher thinks: "Behind his mesmeric speeches and the Nazi propaganda, so debasing in method, so effective in result, quiet soldiers, bureaucrats, and captains of industry are reassembling their forces. When the leader goes, the old hands will be found placed on the levers of policy, but the policy will not be altogether old. Some items, such as the second Punic War with England and the war of revenge on France, are no longer regarded as likely to be remunerative."

Throughout all three of these volumes Mr. Fisher's writing has been a joy to read. He has brought the grace of a man of letters to the arduous task of depicting the human ant-hill achieving its successive cohesions and disruptions.

He is not content, as so many historians are, to utter a name and leave it at that. The name more often than not is illuminated by a phrase which puts the

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man before you : “ Hyndman, the bluff well-to-do Etonian cricketer turned Marxist ” ; “ Thiers, the little man whose impish form, egg-shaped head, and large spectacles were the joy of the caricaturists ” ; Lenin, “ a humanitarian on so large a scale that he could look with composure upon the holocaust of sacrifice.”

Altogether, this is a notable work ; and no one who wishes to have a clear view of causes and effects in modern life can afford to neglect Mr. Fisher’s last volume.

Progress of a Ploughboy

More than a hundred years ago there lived in Philadelphia an old Quaker who had a friend—rash, young and irascible. Every week the Quaker would send his friend a letter containing five words which he hoped—vainly, as it happened—would be for the good of the young man's soul: "Friend William, keep thyself cool."

But Friend William, whose surname was Cobbett, could not keep cool if he would and would not keep cool if he could. He was writing at that time as Peter Porcupine, and the name fitted him to admiration. The man was a living, moving mass of prickles; and, as for coolness—well, if you can conceive a salamander-cum-porcupine, you begin to understand this burning bush of thorns which inserted itself into the side of Authority for the space of a long lifetime.

It was Cobbett's intention to set down himself the story of that long life, but he never got beyond the title. That was to be: *The Progress of a Ploughboy to a Seat in Parliament, as exemplified in the history of William Cobbett, Member of Parliament for Oldham*. He designed, further, that "the frontispiece shall represent me first in a smock-frock, driving the rooks from the corn, and in the lower compartment of the picture standing in the House of Commons addressing the Speaker."

Now, one hundred years save two after Cobbett's death, we have the book—title, picture and all—as he would have wished it to be. The material has been

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lying about in his published and unpublished writings all these years, and Mr. William Reitzel has threaded the beads on to an unobtrusive string and given us Cobbett's story in Cobbett's words.

Cobbett was a Surrey farmer's son, "bred at the plough-tail," a plough-boy so young "that I was compelled to get upon a gate to put the bit-halter upon a cart-horse's head."

William was not modest. He realised that he was a cut above "those frivolous idiots that are turned out from Winchester or Westminster School or from any of thosedens of dunces called colleges and universities," and when he got into the Army, in touch with "the epaulet gentry," he "discovered their profound and surprising ignorance in a twinkling."

Though Cobbett never lacked voice to sing his own praises, he certainly had something to sing about. Deep as his attachment to the country always was, he had one streak which marked him off from the ruck: he was restless and impetuous, had not the rootedness of the countryman.

Thus, when he was a youth waiting to take some girls to a country fair, he saw the London coach bearing down to the cross-roads where he stood. With a few shillings in his pocket and no plans in his mind, he leapt aboard. His career had opened.

After a chafing interlude in London he joined the Army, and in a day when it was rare for a private soldier to be literate he forged ahead. His remarkable industry, sobriety and morality were as rare as his grammar, and in New Brunswick he was promoted from corporal to sergeant-major, missing the intermediate ranks.

He gives himself full marks for the way he ran the regiment, despising the officers "for their gross ignorance and vanity." He was a barrack-room lawyer of the first water, and piled up a pretty dossier

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to support his charges of mismanagement. He prudently awaited his discharge before opening the attack, and found that he might as well have fired popcorns at a brass door. That was his first lesson in the stubborn deep-seatedness of privilege and custom.

He went to France and learned the language; then took himself to America, where he lived by teaching English to Frenchmen. He had married the daughter of a sergeant in the artillery, and his family life was happy and beautiful.

There was a strong anti-English feeling in America, and Cobbett, an enemy of republican forms of government, raised the only effective voice to be heard at that time in defence of his own country. He became a redoubtable political journalist; but as invective, insult and abuse were part of the drive behind this porcupine's quill, he left America as poor as he entered it, a suit for slander having succeeded against him.

Cobbett's pen by now was recognised as so important that the Government tried to buy it. They owned a paper called *The True Briton*. This, he says, was offered to him. He refused it, and became "a sort of self-dependent politician. My opinions were my own. I dashed at all prejudices."

There is no doubt that at that moment Cobbett could have become a pampered place holder, secure for all time.

He was at one time offered £10,000 for his silence; and it is to his credit that the only thing which made him hesitate in his attacks on the Government was fear of the consequences to his family. He was about to be prosecuted for something written in his famous paper, *The Register*. He wrote to his lawyer saying that if the prosecution were dropped he would never publish *The Register* again. His wife and daughter insisted on the letter being cancelled, and Cobbett went to Newgate for two years.

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His work as a Member of Parliament was unimportant: his significance lay in the power of his written word to stir the minds of the common people. He wrote a hundred books and claimed that one of them was the world's best-seller after the Bible. He was of prodigious industry, farming, gardening, reading, writing, journeying on horseback from one end of the country to the other, ready to fly into exile, to go into gaol, or to endure any ignominy on behalf of the working classes, and particularly the labourers in husbandry, who, in his opinion, were "the superior race, and always have been."

It was because among these people he saw the poor grow poorer while the riches that should have irrigated the whole land were drained into growing reservoirs, the property of the few, that he lived in a white passion of rebellion. The countryside was to him the only sure buttress of morality and prosperity; the labourers on the land were the acolytes of the only religion he believed in.

In this book you will find not only a memorable picture of English life and manners a hundred years ago, but also the self-portrait of one who, with all his faults, was a great patriot, a great writer and a great friend of those who most needed to be befriended.



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## *Sarah Siddons*

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A young and beautiful actress, playing in her father's strolling company, fell in love with a youth who had recently joined the players.

Her parents were nothing for the match. The youth was kicked out of the company; the girl was packed off to be a lady's maid; and about two years later they married. It was, perhaps, the inevitable outcome of such a "cure." When the bridegroom slipped the ring on the girl's finger he created a name that still rolls like a drum: Sarah Kemble became Mrs. Siddons.

Life was not easy for the pair, though it had not the extreme rigour that some of the barnstormers knew. They had not to sleep in sheds and outhouses; they could use the coach for their travels and take their ease at an inn.

They came one night to the Black Boar, in Devizes, and as they sat in the lamplight of their room the door opened and the landlord's son, a beautiful child about five years old, bounced in on a hobby-horse. Presently he plumped himself down at the table, produced some coloured chalks, and drew a fine likeness of the eighteen-year-old actress.

So two people destined to be very famous confronted one another for the first time. The child could hardly be expected to know that his sitter, whose beauty had so instantly seized his imagination, would be the greatest actress Britain had ever produced; and how should young Mrs. Siddons have an eye prophetic

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enough to see before her Sir Thomas Lawrence, President of the Royal Academy?

Miss Naomi Royde-Smith, in her *Private Life of Mrs. Siddons*, sees more in it than that. The quiet lamp-lit room was the stage on which was played the prelude to a passionate drama. There a great love drew its earliest breath, felt the first beat of predestinate wings.

Go at once from prelude to epilogue. Fifty-five years have passed. A lovely girl named Fanny Kemble is making her first bow on the London stage. Old Mrs. Siddons, all her triumphs behind her, has dragged her tired limbs from her house in Upper Baker-street to see her beautiful niece play Juliet. She is seventy-four. Her husband, partner of that fly-away match so long ago, has been dead for many years, and she has seen too many children to the grave also.

There had been Kembles before her; the stage would always get anything named Kemble; here now was the latest of the line, young and beautiful as she herself had been that night when Tom Lawrence rode his hobby-horse into the room at Devizes.

If she had shifted her gaze from the stage she would have seen that Thomas Lawrence was in the theatre too. He had had a marvellous life. Fame had heaped his arms with good things. Now he was sixty, a bachelor, anxious as ever to paint a lovely Kemble. He was soon at work on Fanny, and, seeing that next month she would be twenty, he bought for her a copy of Reynolds' "Tragic Muse," the great picture of the great Sarah Siddons, and he wrote this upon it: "This portrait by England's greatest painter of the noblest subject of his pencil is presented to her niece and worthy successor by her most faithful, humble friend and servant, Lawrence."

After the birthday he took the picture back, with some excuse about giving it a better frame. He took

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it from its frame. He "took his pen and obliterated the words 'and worthy successor.' He had retracted his heresy. There was only one Mrs. Siddons. Fanny was nothing but the wraith of the glory that came dazzling back to his remembering eyes. The picture was returned to its frame. 'Cover it up,' said Lawrence to the man who showed it to him for his approval. 'I cannot bear to look at it.' A few days later he was dead."

"And I have lived to see him go before me!" Mrs. Siddons exclaimed. To her brother she had said: "Charles, when I die I wish to be carried to my grave by you and Lawrence." Eighteen months later she followed Lawrence to the grave.

So much for the prelude and the epilogue. The play itself is complicated by this startling fact: that Lawrence had made love, at different times, to both of Mrs. Siddons's daughters. He had wanted to marry both Sally and Maria; and, as Miss Royde-Smith sees the drama, he was warded off by Mrs. Siddons, because, though perhaps the knowledge was never crystallised in a conscious realisation, she loved him herself.

Miss Royde-Smith brings forward few concrete facts on which to base her belief. She calls her book "a psychological investigation," and there is always some danger that theories, looking well enough when dressed up as psychology, would look like guessing in plainer garb. The most dangerous part of the book seems to me to be that which illustrates Mrs. Siddons's feeling for Lawrence by reference to the parts she played.

If the actress who played the part, why not the author who wrote it? Once embarked on argument along these lines, what writer or actor could not be used to illustrate any theory of the psychological investigator?

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But there is the incident of the birthday gift to Fanny Kemble. There is Mrs. Siddons's request that Lawrence should bear her body to the grave. There is the fact that Lawrence seemed obsessed by Kembles and was for ever drawing any member of the family who would lend a face to his pencil. There is the courtship by Lawrence of the Siddons girls ; and, putting two and two together, Miss Royde-Smith certainly builds up a plausible case as to "the real character of the bond that kept her daughters' suitor so fixed in his pursuit."

Maria and Sally both died young—"for love of the man from whom their mother could not save them because her subjugation to him was as abject and more far-reaching than theirs."

It was an odd situation for Lawrence, caught between two generations of beauty : the mother thirteen years his senior, with loveliness still daily ripening and enhanced by prodigious fame; the daughters, one six years his junior and one ten, rather empty-headed but blessed with adolescent charm. At least we may believe that, when death had cut that knot, when Siddons, too, was gone, this man and woman turned to one another with deepening dependence as the years emptied of everything but their growing fame.

Together they had come from poverty to wealth, from obscurity to eminence, to some certitude not only of present honour but of immortal fame. They had warmed their hands at the same fires ; and as the fires began to rustle to extinction, who shall wonder that they drew closer in heart and mind before the embers turning from red to grey ?

A Village in a Valley

At Allways, which is the village in Huntingdonshire where Mr. Beverley Nichols lives, we learn from his new book that a meeting was recently held to discuss the financing of a village shop. It was suggested that an advertisement about it might be put in a newspaper.

"And Mrs. M. beamed at me and said, 'You could write it for us! In your nice, light way!'"

And here, written in that now celebrated nice, light way, is not a mere line wasting its sweetness on a local sheet, but a whole book, called *A Village in a Valley*.

Before we go any farther, let us take note of the extraordinarily large part which women play in the life of Allways, as Mr. Nichols records it for us. It is to be presumed that at Allways, as in other villages, there are villagers, men who plough fields and herd sheep and get dusty in summer and mucky in winter.

But these carles and caitiffs do not appear even as supers on the gay and garlanded stage of rustic life as conceived by Watteau-Nichols. True, there was once a nauseating glimpse of a man "carrying a very bloody rabbit in his hand." He was drunk, too, and Mr. Shelley, who was being shown round the village in the expectation that he would settle down there, said, "What a *frightful*-looking creature!" That was bad enough, but when poor Mr. Shelley threw up the windows of the house he was inspecting,

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do you know what happened to him? *He smelled pigs.* Well—I mean to say—pigs in an English village! Mr. Shelley, quite rightly, went back to London.

But let no gentle reader be affrighted by these sulphurous whiffs from the hell of reality. The graceful grille of Mr. Nichols's verbiage shuts them into their proper place, and we dwell mainly among the ladies. There is a vicar, I admit, and there is the Professor; but Undine, and Miss Bott, and Mrs. M., and Miss Hazlitt, and old Miss Grant and Lady Osprey—these are the spiritual allies of Mr. Nichols in his war to make the English countryside safe for the æsthetes.

There was a day when Mr. Nichols was going through his letters, and a rude schoolboy who was with him snatched one up and opened the envelope. "I say," he shouted, "this is from a girl . . ." and Mr. Nichols admitted coyly that he received letters even from negresses in Liberia.

Even the flowers become girlish for Mr. Nichols—"giant poppies, pale pink, rose and scarlet . . . those superbly intoxicated flowers that are like Southern girls . . . those abandoned things, with their petals loose, and their sultry lips for ever pouting."

Having written this paragraph, Mr. Nichols makes a "gift" of it to "the gentlemen of the Press who parody me." But, tempting as the picture is of Mr. Nichols among the intoxicated flowers—he who is so harsh on the poor intoxicated rabbit-catcher, a man needing a pint, no doubt, more urgently than the poppies did—tempting as that picture is, I prefer the one of Mr. Nichols among the chestnut trees. He discovered a breaking chestnut bud and was "unable to resist the temptation to take one of the sticky, silky things" and "open it out, spreading its fan for it." And then he was "seized with remorse,

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in case the night should be cold or the wind unduly harsh," and he "tried to stick the baby leaves together again."

The book is full of half-baked assumptions. "The minute any man except the farm labourer begins to ponder the sources of his income, he will feel inclined to hang his head in shame." Will he, Mr. Nichols? You go and ask the district nurse, pedalling her old pushbike through the sleet of a winter midnight; you ask the coal miner, and the trawler-hand, and the men who sweat in front of blast furnaces.

"It must be sad to come home if you have no garden waiting for you. For then you have no alternative but to read the silly news-sheet." Any intelligent being could suggest a dozen alternatives in five minutes.

One day Miss Hazlitt "said something which to me was extremely wise and illuminating. She said: 'Spiritual things are spiritually discerned.'" Wise and illuminating, indeed, but Miss Hazlitt had cribbed it from St. Paul.

This Miss Hazlitt was an amazing woman. There was a well at the bottom of her garden, and the water drained into it through the graveyard. It was pointed out to Miss Hazlitt that the water was poisonous. "They've been burying there since Saxon times." Miss Hazlitt replied: "It is hallowed ground."

I can understand a woman saying that, but what I cannot understand is why this remark worthy of a congenital idiot should move Mr. Nichols to rhapsodies. "When she said it it sounded not only beautiful but true—as though the water that had flowed through God's acre must, in some way, be sweetened and purified."

Altogether, it's a rum place, is Allways. I love to think of Mr. Nichols snugly entrenched there, read-

ing by the light of his private electric plant while the yokels get up by candle-light to milk the cows; enjoying the water of his private well; gardening with the aid of a gardener, supporting rural life with the help of a manservant, having a car to get out of it whenever he wants to, and shaking his fist at that abominable thing called Civilisation, Progress, what you will, which threatens to take to the rustic cottages the amenities which he has been careful to provide for himself, and which he chortles over with Miss Bott, Mrs. M., Miss Hazlitt, Lady Osprey, Undine, and sixty thousand readers and all.

An Adventure

On August 10, 1901, two English women, who knew little of France and had no more than the customary smattering knowledge of French history, paid a visit to Versailles. They wanted to see the Petit Trianon, and they did see it—in remarkable circumstances.

So remarkable, indeed, were the experiences through which they passed that afternoon that ten years went by before they published the story of what they had seen. Though French history had not, at that time, particularly engaged their attention, they were scholarly women. They understood the value of evidence, and they felt that a great deal of evidence would be needed to convince the world that they were not telling a fairy tale.

Therefore it was not until 1911 that they published the book called *An Adventure*. It created a stir at the time, and has been republished several times since, but even now it is not as well known to the reading public as it deserves to be. I find it one of the most extraordinary and fascinating books in the world, not only because of the story the women tell but because of the cold and scientific accuracy which they applied for ten years to the building up of their case.

For a long time the identity of the two women was hidden by their pen-names. Now we know who they were. One of them was Miss C. A. E. Moberly, whose father was successively headmaster of Winchester College and Bishop of Winchester, and who

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herself became principal of St. Hugh's College, Oxford. The other was Miss E. F. Jourdain, who succeeded Miss Moberly as head of St. Hugh's. Their book, *An Adventure*, is republished to-day.

The women were not excited or in any "psychic" mood as they took their walk that afternoon. It was a breezy day, and Miss Moberley has recorded "we both felt particularly vigorous." They did not know their way, and they walked along "talking about England and mutual acquaintances there."

So they came to three paths and took the centre one, because some men were ahead who, they thought, might direct them. The men were wearing "long-greyish-green coats with small three-cornered hats." They directed the women straight ahead.

Both have recorded that at this point an unaccountable depression came over them. They came to a wood, and in its shadow found a repulsive-looking man sitting by a garden kiosk. He wore a cloak and a large shady hat. They did not wish to speak to so disagreeable-looking a fellow, and were spared the necessity, for, turning at the sound of footsteps, as of someone running breathlessly, they were confronted by one who was "obviously a gentleman." His antique dress made him look "like an old picture." He spoke excitedly, directing them to the house.

They noted, as they went, the rustic bridge; the ravine, a cascade falling down a bank; and so they came upon the north side of the house. The house stood upon a terrace, and sitting in the rough grass at the terrace foot, and with her back to the house, was a woman sketching.

Miss Moberly was able to note all the details of her dress, and that "it was not a young face, and (though rather pretty) it did not attract me." It was only when they compared notes afterwards that Miss Moberly discovered that her companion had not seen

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this woman at all. And from a portrait Miss Moberly was able to satisfy herself that the woman was Marie Antoinette.

However, that is to get too far ahead with the story. The two women went up on to the terrace and walked round the house for some little distance when a young man, having "the jaunty manner of a footman," called out offering to show them the entrance to the house. He did so, and they walked round the rooms, left the house, and went back to take tea in Versailles.

And that, they thought, was that; not aware that anything unusual had happened. They did remark on the queerly theatrical costumes of the people they had seen, but it did not suggest the significance of their experience.

They met again three months later, and then Miss Moberly said to Miss Jourdain, "If we had known that a lady was sitting so near us sketching . . ." and Miss Jourdain said she had seen no lady.

Then they determined that each should write an independent account of what she had seen; and you will find those accounts in this book.

This strange story goes on to tell how the women later discovered that the garden kiosk where the ugly man had been sitting, and the ravine, the rustic bridge, the cascade, and much else, were no longer in existence. They had wandered in, and carefully noted the details of a landscape that had vanished off the face of the earth.

And so, for ten years, they applied themselves to the task of discovering whether these things ever had existed. It was an extraordinarily difficult task, for the documents that would confirm or discredit the story were hidden away heaven knew where and there were no written works founded on them.

The one fact which is completely devastating to scepticism is that the "vision" unquestionably

preceded the research. In the Bodleian at Oxford you will find all the letters that passed between the women, urging the clearing up of this point and that; and in the Archives Nationales and the Bibliothèque Nationale at Paris you can find Miss Jourdain's name signed with the dates of her visits.

They established at last the identity of the running man and the ugly man and the jaunty footman. They established every detail of uniform and clothing. They established from the documents of Marie Antoinette's gardener the lay-out of the Trianon gardens in her time, though there was not a living person who knew until these two women dragged the facts to light.

Miss Edith Olivier, who writes a preface to this edition, will not have the book called a "ghost-story." She says: "Nowadays no well-educated person would think that it could be explained by calling it one. It is the record of an unexplained extension of the limits of human experience, and it describes an experience of a type with which science is more and more concerning itself."

I do not know whether there is any significance in the date of the "vision"—August 10. It was on August 10, 1792, that the Tuileries was sacked and the shadow of the guillotine darkened the destiny of Marie Antoinette.

The Southern Gates of Arabia

The great idea in travel books nowadays is to "put across" the personality of the writer.

He must loom at least as large as the empire which he has condescended to explore; through it he trails his invincible Britishness, and an old school tie floats over him like a banner.

But that is not the way with the most indomitable explorer of to-day, and the explorer who writes most beautifully about the things seen. I mean Miss Freya Stark.

The Valley of the Assassins, which, so far as I know was Miss Stark's first book, made it clear that here was not only a great traveller but also a great writer. Her new book, *The Southern Gates of Arabia*, more than fulfils all that the first led us to expect.

These two books, I think, will be read for many years to come. I do not see how they can elude their obvious destiny: inclusion at last in the aristocracy of letters.

You have to dredge very closely through this new book to find out anything about its author. From stray remarks that fall here and there I have built up my picture of a small, indomitable woman ("I am only 5 feet 2 inches"), who draws solace in difficult times from the Latin classics, and who is so happily able to meet all sorts and conditions of people in friendship that she writes: "People hardly ever wish to kill me."

That is about all I have been able to gather concerning this intrepid adventurer and great writer, except that she finds a handshake more useful than a gun, that she takes no companions on her travels, and that she does not believe in being "aloof" with the servants whom she employs. On the contrary, she sits with them round the fire at night, eats with them, and all is well.

She met an Arab, who was surprised to find a white woman travelling without a servant to look after her personal concerns. He had been in Kenya.

"No Ferangi goes without a servant," he said. "You should have one, and then you could sit in one room, and he sit in another, and whenever you feel like it you say, 'Boy.'"

"This picture of European life and its pleasures," Miss Stark tells us, "amused us all." She was always able to share her amusement with any stray person.

The object of the journey which she describes in this book was to find out something about the old "incense roads" that began on the southern seaboard of Arabia and ran through the deserts for thousands of miles, taking to smoke on unnumbered altars that odorous resin called frankincense, whose perfume gave to Arabia the name of "Felix."

Unimaginably old those trade routes are, some of them lost, some of them now matters merely of conjecture. Here and there the frankincense industry is still carried on, but it is a shadow of the great enterprise that, since the dawn of time, had sent up pleasant savours to alien gods.

"The key of the trade," says Miss Stark, "lay East in the cliff-bordered valley and narrow defiles of Hadhramaut, whose 'people alone . . . and no other people among the Arabians behold the incense tree'; who ruled over the port of Cana and the coastlands to Dhufar; and whose capital, Shabwa, the

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Sabota of Pliny, 'situate in a lofty mountain,' and with sixty temples within its walls, could open or lock from its single gateway the sluices that fed the great commercial road."

Shabwa was the objective of Miss Stark's journey. She did not reach it, for illness prostrated her and an urgent message had to be sent to the coast whence an airplane came to take her to hospital.

But she penetrated to regions hitherto unvisited by an unattended white woman, and she has put on record, both with her pen and through a series of magnificent photographs, the face of the land and the habits of the people in a region which to most of us is fabulous.

With her little caravan of donkeys, and later in a car, she passed through "this clear altitude, where the basic forces of the earth are building, and it seems absurd to reckon time in human years. The scrubby plants are scarce more momentary than men who pass in transitory generations, leaving no more trace than does a fly on the steady hand of a craftsman at his labour."

Those are the sort of things I have in mind when I call Miss Stark a great writer. The book abounds in them.

It is a book which gives us inside knowledge, for this woman has the happy art of friendship. In the immemorial towns, where an Arabian Nights beauty is achieved in an architecture of mud, and where that beauty is offset by dreadful sanitation, she lived in the houses of chiefs and people.

Sultans and slaves were her friends and all men and women between. In some places the Roman luxury of sunk baths was to be found; and in places of which the "civilised" have never heard there were men whose devotion to loveliness would be shown by a carved front door that cost £50.

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But there is more than one way of being "civilised." One wonders whether a wandering Arab in some Western land would find the courtesy and hospitality that went out of its way, that stretched every point, to make Miss Stark at home and that seemed to recognise instinctively the virtue of a quest for knowledge that had no commercial value.


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